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A
SECOND DISSERTATION
UPON
HERETICAL OPINIONS;

SHEWING
The NATURE of HERESY,

In what Respects ERRORS in RELIGION may be
INNOCENT or SINFUL ; the CAUSES from
which they generally proceed ; the EXCUSES often
alleged by FALSE CHRISTIANS and AVOWED UN-
BELIEVERS.

CONCLUDING WITH
An ADDRESS to the YOUNGER STUDENTS
IN THE UNIVERSITY.

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Rector of Leigh in Worcestershire, Minister of Badsey and Wick-
amford, and Chaplain to the Right Hon. Lord ARCHER.

*In necessariis Unitas,
In non-necessariis Libertas,
In omnibus Caritas.*

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ADVERTISEMENT.

IT may not be improper to acquaint the *Reader*, that a great Part of this and the former *Dissertation* was preached before the Univerſity in four *Discourses*, which the Author had ſome Thoughts of offering to the *Publick*; but he was adviſed by a learned Friend, (to whoſe Judgment and Sincerity he has Reason to pay the higheſt Regard) to enlarge farther upon the *Subject*, and to throw the *Sermons* into the preſent Form; and he begs Leave farther to obſerve, that he has ſome Intentions of a *Third Dissertation upon Heretical Opinions*, ſhewing the Duty of *Proteſtants*, above all others, to *hold faſt the Profeſſion of their Faith*, and to guard themſelves againſt the evil Contagion of *Infidelity* or *Heresy*; and that the Fences which *the Church of England* has raiſed againſt the Inroad of Errors in Religion, are formed with Wiſdom, Candour and Moderation, without any flagrant Abuſes of *Authority*, or arbitrary Infringements upon *Chriſtian Liberty*.

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TO
THE YOUNGER STUDENTS
IN THE UNIVERSITY
OF OXFORD,
THIS DISSERTATION
IS,
WITH THE GREATEST ESTEEM,
AND THE SINCEREST WISHES
FOR THEIR WELFARE
AND HAPPINESS,
DEDICATED
BY THE AUTHOR.

ERRATA.

Page 42. line 6. for *civil Disguises* read *evil Disguises*.

64. 24. for *called* r. *call*.

77. 14. for *Cobwebs of Religion* r. of *mere human
Invention*.



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The CONTENTS.

SECT. I.	Page
<i>THE Preface; recapitulating the Arguments of the former Dissertation, with some Remarks introductory to the present Subject.</i>	I
SECT. II.	
<i>The Nature of Heresy explained.</i>	10
SECT. III.	
<i>Errors in Religion, which have the fairest Pretensions to Innocence.</i>	22
SECT. IV.	
<i>Some Circumstances, which (if they do not entirely obliterate) will much extenuate the Blame of religious Errors.</i>	30
SECT. V.	
<i>Errors in Religion, which are attended with the greatest Aggravations of Guilt, and are productive of the most fatal and dangerous Effects.</i>	39
SECT. VI.	
<i>Some of the principal Causes of heretical Opinions, arising from Ignorance, Indolence, Credulity, and Superstition.</i>	47
SECT. VII.	
<i>Other Causes of Errors in Religion, arising from Pride, Passion, Prejudice, and Prepossession.</i>	54

The CONTENTS.

SECT. VIII.

Others Causes of Errors in Religion, arising from Education, Custom, Authority, and other social Connexions. 61

SECT. IX.

Other Causes of Religious Errors, arising from an heretical Turn of Mind, from a Fondness for Innovation, from systematical Principles, and above all, from Vice and Immorality. 68

SECT. X.

A brief Sketch of some vain and incoherent Opinions, patronized by modern Hereticks and Unbelievers. 74

SECT. XI.

An Examination of those Excuses, which are generally urged by false Christians and avowed Unbelievers. 83

SECT. XII.

The Conclusion; addressed to the younger Students in the University; shewing the Utility of Human Learning, for the Advancement of religious Knowledge. 95

23 OC 62

SECT. XIII.

The same continued, with some practical Directions for the avoiding of heretical Opinions. 115

A

DISSERTATION

U P O N 2

HERETICAL OPINIONS, &c.

S E C T. I.

The PREFACE, recapitulating the Arguments of the former Dissertation; with some Remarks introductory to the present Subject.

IT may seem strange at first View, that the Church of Christ, in every successive Age, should have been infested with such a Multiplicity of *heretical Opinions*; but if we consider the Frailties and Infirmities, the Instability and Perverseness of human Nature; or, if we enquire into the State and Condition of Mankind, in the several respective Periods of the Gospel, It *must needs be*, Matt. xviii. 7. or as it is elsewhere expressed, *Luke xvii. 1.*

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it was morally *impossible*, but *that offences should come*, and spread their baleful Influence, even in Defiance of the most strong and rational Evidences of Truth.

The Gospel indeed in it's first Infancy was embraced by *Many*, some of which were Persons of Eminence and Distinction, such as *Nicodemus* and Others, who *were not ashamed of Christ and His Words*, but *confessed his Name in the midst of an adulterous and sinful Generation*, Mark. viii. 38.

But how inconsiderable a Number was This, in Comparifon of Them, who were the avowed and implacable Enemies of the Christian Faith? The Character and Conduct of the Jews need no Explication. *Justin Martyr*^a observes, *that no People were so averse to Christ and his Followers*; and *Epiphanius*^b tells us, that such was their determined Rancour and Malice, they *three times every Day anathematized the Nazareans in their Synagogues*.

Nor were the *Gentiles* less inveterate Enemies to the *Cross of Christ*; in these early Ages, Arts and Sciences flourished, the *Greeks sought after Wisdom*, and the celebrated *Schools of Philosophy* had taken such fast hold of

^a Dial. 234, 235.

^b Epip. H. xxix. 9. P. 194.

their Minds and Affections, that the Gospel, *though the Power of God and the Wisdom of God was to Them but Foolishness*, 1 Cor. i. 24.

Many, both of the *Jews* and *Gentiles*, who pretended to be Converts to the Religion of Jesus, debased it by their impure Mixtures; The *One*, by endeavouring to incorporate it in the same System with the Rites and Ordinances of the *Law*; The *Others*, by adulterating the Purity and Simplicity of it by *cunningly devised Fables*, and the *enticing Words of Man's Wisdom*.

By these Obstructions on both sides, the Progress of the Gospel was much retarded; the Poison of Heresy was daily infused into the Minds of the People, and spread it's Infection through most Ranks and Orders of Men. But notwithstanding all Opposition, the *Word of God grew mightily and prevailed*; it took *Root downwards*, and spread it's Branches upwards. When *Constantine* was converted *to the true Faith*, and favoured it *with the public Countenance* of secular Authority, how greatly was the Scene changed? in the free Enjoyment of Religion, and in the outward Splendor of the Church, but with what little Improvement in Truth and Virtue? The most pleasing hopes were entertained of uninterrupted Peace and Tran-

quillity, but how soon did this fair Prospect shift itself, and vanish, even as a *Shadow*? The Passions of Men began to operate, continual Feuds and Animosities prevailed, Parties were formed against Parties, and the established *Orthodoxy* of one *provincial Assembly* was branded for *Heresy* by another. In the midst of these Factions, when the Minds of Men were inflamed with Pride, Ambition, and a violent over-heated zeal, where was the *pure and undefiled* Religion of Christ? How was it corrupted by the interested Views of artful and designing Men?

To put an End to these violent Contentions, the Church of *Rome* formed a very compendious and decisive Plan: For *the Children of this World are in their Generation wiser than the Children of Light*, Luke xvi. 8. A System of *ecclesiastical Tyranny* was raised to an enormous Height, and an arbitrary Dominion and Sovereignty were exercised over the Minds and Consciences of Men: The *Supremacy* of the *Pope* and the *Infallibility* of the *Church* were the powerful Engines made use of, to batter down what was *then called Heresy*, and to establish a political Kingdom of this World, instead of a pure and spiritual Kingdom of Christ. ----- In the succeeding Ages and as an *Under-prop* to this grand *Hierarchy*,

rarchy, many *monastic Institutions* were formed and held in the highest Veneration, being supposed to be well calculated for the visible Glory of the *Catholick and Apostolical Church*, as it was then called ; but in fact, they debased the Dignity of human Nature, and cast a gloomy and uncomfortable Aspect upon Religion. That sanctified *Garb* of Piety, which was assumed by the solemn Recluses of these dark Cloysters, only shewed them to be, like the *Pharisees* of old, *Wolves in Sheep's Cloathing* ; instead of improving the Minds of Themselves or Others, by a free and liberal Enquiry into the Truths of Religion, like the supine *Vassals*, They were ready to bear any Burdens, which the Authority of the *Pope*, and the arbitrary Decrees of *Councils*, were pleased to impose upon them.

In these later Centuries, Learning was in a dark *Eclipse* ; and when the greater Part of the World were immersed in the thick Clouds of *Gothick Ignorance*, it is no wonder that the *pure Light of the glorious Gospel of Christ, who is the Image of God, did not shine in their Hearts* : This was the seasonable *Hour of Darknness*, when the Doctrines of the Church of *Rome* were many of them sown ; and in so corrupt a Soil, they could not but increase abundantly ; but the *good Seed of the Word*
of

of God was choaked and over-ran as with *Tares* and *Weeds*.

In the next Period of the Church, some Glimmerings of *Learning* seemed to shew themselves, but with such imperfect and uncertain Rays of Reflection, that they rather encreased than dispelled the *Mists* of Superstition: The profound Erudition of the *Schoolmen*, those *angelick* and *irrefragable Doctors*, as they were often called, produced little better, if not worse Effects, than that *Blindness*, which in part happened to the *Ages* before it. The stiff Theology of these Times was so much sophisticated, by metaphysical Subtleties and unintelligible *Definitions*, by *Divisions* without *Difference*, and *Conclusions* without a just Relation to the *Premises*, that when erroneous Opinions were cloathed in this formal and affected Dress, what were they but as *filthy Rags*, the shattered Fragments of *Ignorance* rather than of true *Wisdom*?

Perhaps these elaborate Reasoners might, in some Measure, pave the Way for better Knowledge, and might be the Means of exciting a more industrious Pursuit after it: The latent Seeds of *Genius*, which had long been buried as it were under *Ground*, began soon afterwards to revive, and to shew themselves

selves in open View ; *Learning*, after a long Captivity, asserted it's Freedom, enlarged as well as refined the Sentiments of Mankind ; and Religion, as well as Philosophy, was better understood, explained with more Accuracy, and enforced with more Ability, with more Perspicuity and Strength of Argument.

When the glorious *Æra* of the *Reformation* commenced, the Church of Christ was happily purged from the Dregs and Corruptions of Popery, but not *without Spot or Wrinkle, or any such thing* : It cannot be said, that our first *Reformers* were all of them upright in their Principles, or unblameable in their Conduct ; and it were to be wished, that their Zeal in some Instances had been tempered with more Candour and Moderation, and that when they discarded the Errors and Absurdities of the Church of *Rome*, they had acted, like true *Protestants*, with more Harmony and Uniformity of Sentiment, as *having one Lord, one Faith, one Baptism, one God and Father of all*, Eph. iv. 5, 6.

Their Cause was truly worthy of their *Master* and Themselves ; but Zeal and Prudence do not always go hand in hand together, even in the Defence of *Truth* itself.

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These were the principal *Topicks*, which were enlarged upon in a former Dissertation, and which I endeavoured to illustrate and confirm by an Induction of *Particulars*, by pointing out the various *Heresies*, which infested the Christian Church, and disturbed the Peace of it in all the several Ages of Christianity; and from this extensive View of erroneous Opinions, I took Occasion to answer the Objections, which are frequently urged by false Christians as well as avowed Unbelievers, and to shew, that the vain Imaginations of Men are no Arguments against the Truth of *Christianity*, nor any Proof of the Obscurity of the Scripture-Doctrines; --- That, though erroneous Opinions always did and will abound, yet they by no Means infer a Necessity of a *Supreme Judge* or *infallible Interpreter* in religious Controversies; --- That they are so far from being inconsistent with the blessed Promises of the Gospel, that they strictly agree with the positive and express Declarations of it; --- That *Protestants* have good and sufficient Helps for the right Understanding of the *Word of God*; --- That a Diversity of Sentiments amongst Christians ought rather to encourage than obstruct a Freedom of Enquiry; --- That these, how various soever, are no just Foundation for the
Exertion

Exertion of *coercive Measures* ; --- and lastly, that the novel Devices, and heretical Notions of Men, are no Grounds of Impeachment against the Wisdom or Goodness of God, or against the Dignity or moral Excellence of human Nature.

But still a wider Field now opens itself upon us : it may be asked, what is the characteristic Nature of *Heresy* ? and what is the true Scripture-Account of it ? What Errors have the fairest Pretensions to Innocence ? What Circumstances may extenuate the Guilt of them, and what may add to them the greatest Degrees of Malignity ? It may not be improper likewise to consider the principal Causes of Infidelity and Heresy, the Motives which give Men up, though rational Creatures, to *strong Delusions*, the *Excuses* generally urged in Favour of them, and the best Means of avoiding dangerous Mistakes in Religion, and of coming to a right Knowledge of the Truth.

These, it must be allowed, are Points of some Importance ; and as a distinct Examination of them may be of Use, especially to younger Students in Divinity, this will be the Business, or the Attempt, at least, of the present Enquiry.

S E C T. II.

The Nature of Heresy explained.

THIS has been the Subject of much Debate. *Heresy* has been considered in a very different Light, with regard to it's Nature; and in a different Latitude, with respect to it's Innocence or Guilt, according to the several Views and Principles of Men.

Some put the softest Constructions upon religious Errors, and, under a specious Claim of universal *Liberty*, plead for the *Indifference* of all speculative Opinions.

Some have such narrow and contracted Notions, that they brand all for *Hereticks*, who do not veer their religious Sentiments according to their *Signal*.

Others, in Submission to public Authority, make the Decisions of the *Church*, or the Will of the *Magistrate*, the only Tests and Standards of Truth.

To avoid this Embarras, the Laws of our own Country have not defined *Heresy* at all; and many Writers, who pretend to develope and explain the Nature of it, have differed from

from each other in their Definitions of it, or have given us very vague and indeterminate Descriptions of it.

In order therefore to form our Judgments with some Accuracy and Precision, it may not be improper to make a distinct Enquiry into those peculiar Qualities, which enter into the Character and Composition of a *Heretick*. This may be of some Use towards fixing a proper Centre of Union, for establishing Peace and Harmony amongst Christians, and for quieting the Minds and Consciences of *Protestants*, who have been too often stigmatized by our Popish Adversaries with the odious Title of *Hereticks*.

The first Idea which obviously presents itself to us, is, that *Heresy* in it's primary Signification is not a *practical*, but a *speculative* Error. It may often draw after it a long Train of evil Consequences; but it properly denotes, not an outward Defect in the moral Conduct, but an internal Obliquity of the Mind. How often do we see the strictest *Orthodoxy* disgraced by a Corruption of Manners, even the purest Church defiled by Vice and Immorality? On the other Hand, *Heretical Principles* are so far from being always attended by bad Practices, that they often insinuate themselves by an outward and af-

fectd Garb of *Sanctity*. Who were attached to a more pernicious System of Opinions than the *Montanists* ^c? But how remarkably were they distinguished by a rigid Austerity of Life? And This was most probably the Cause, which drew *Tertullian* into those unhappy Delusions. *Heresy* therefore regards Sentiment more than Action; and though Vice be often the fatal Effect, yet it does not always follow it, as a necessary and inseparable Companion.

It is indeed a common Observation, that a *bad Life is the worst Heresy*: but this does not imply, that it is an essential and constituent Part of it, but only the worst adventitious Circumstance that can be annexed to it. But still it is to be observed, that *Heresy* is not a simple and naked *Error* of the *Understanding* only; it penetrates deeper, and the Malignity of it consists in an obstinate and determined Perverseness of the *Will*. It is this, which tinctures this poisonous *Cup*, and gives it the *Gall of Bitterness*. The old Saying of St. *Augustin* ^d, that *he might err, but*

^c We are told, that the *Montanists* kept three *Lents* in the Year, and that upon dry Meats, in perfect Abstinence from Flesh. Hieron. Ep. 54. ad Marcellum. Tertull. de Jejun. c. 15.

^d Errare possum, Hereticus esse nolo.

was unwilling to be a Heretick, marks out a plain Distinction between casual and involuntary Mistakes in Religion, and such as are the fixed and deliberate Issues of a bad Intention. *Out of the Heart*, as our Lord himself tells us, *proceed evil Thoughts, Murders, Adulteries, Fornications, Thefts, false Witness, Blasphemies; These*, says he, *are the Things which defile a Man*, Matt. xv. 19, 20. They taint all the Faculties of the Soul, blind the Understanding, misguide the Judgment, and when a partial Bias is once given to the Mind, it sees Things through a wrong Medium, and can neither discern the Truth, nor seek it in *the Love thereof*.

The very *Root*, from whence the Word *Herefy*^e is derived, shews to what Character it ought to be applied; it properly signifies *Volition* or *Choice*, and emphatically points out the Man who is governed, not by the sacred Rules of Reason and Religion, but by his own capricious Fancy, and the *voluntary Corruptions* of his own Heart.

And this Offence is much heightened, and the Guilt accumulated, in Proportion to the Weight and Importance of the Subject. The formal Heretick is not contented with little

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frivolous Disputes, *about Meats or Drinks, and Days and Seasons*, such as the *Observation of Easter*, or the *Place* where our *Saviour's Feet once stood*; but he shoots his Arrows with a more envenomed Point at the Substance of Religion, at the most vital and essential Parts of it. --- It is in the fairest Soil of the Gospel that he delights to sow his Seed, that it may take the deeper Root, and spread it's noxious Influence, even where the best *Fruits* might reasonably be expected.

All indeed are not agreed in their Notions of the *fundamental Principles* of Religion: the *Church of Rome* places them in needless *Redundancies*, in unwritten *Traditions*, and in the vain Pomp and Pageantry of Rites and Ceremonies; and these are made the *cardinal Points*, upon which the grand *Fabrick* of Superstition stands, and principally depends: But these are so far from being the *Pillars and Ground of Truth*, that they undermine the Foundation of the Gospel, and make the *Commandments of God* of none Effect.

But, to the Honour of *Protestants*, it may be said, that they have *not so learned Christ*; They build upon *no other Foundation* than that of the *Apostles and Prophets*, *Jesus Christ himself being the chief Corner Stone*. Upon whom therefore ought the Reproach of Heresy to fall?

fall? Not upon them who hold *fast the Form of sound Words*, and make the essential Doctrines of Christianity the great Standards of their Opinions and Conduct; but upon those who torture, and, as it were, invert the Scriptures, by preferring the *Inventions* of Men, (if subservient to their Pride, Ambition, and secular Interests) before the fundamental Articles of Faith, or the *weightier Matters of the Law*.

It may perhaps be asked, Do *Protestants* harbour no *Heresies* within their own Bosom? It must be allowed, that we have too *many Enemies even in our own Household, Men of corrupt Minds and reprobate concerning the Faith*. But to what are these Abuses owing? Not to the imperious and arbitrary Commands of Church Authority, but to the wilful and heretical Depravity of their own Minds. It is their own *Fault*; and the Guilt of it must lye at their own Doors, as being Enemies to *themselves*, to that *Church*, of which they pretend to be Members, and to all the sacred Obligations of Reason and Religion; to *themselves*, because they are voluntarily given up, as a Prey, to the *Deceivableness of Unrighteousness*; to the *Church*, because they endeavour to subvert the whole Frame and Constitution of it; and to Reason as well as Religion,

Religion, because they are hardened against all rational Conviction, make a *Mock at Sin*, trample the sacred Laws of Religion under Foot, and endeavour to rob their Fellow-Creatures of their best Hopes and Comfort.

But here we must make another, and indeed a very material Distinction. In the whole Mass of heretical Opinions, there is not always the same *Leaven of Malice and Wickedness*. As *Heresy* ^f, says *Grotius*, is the *Poison of the Church*, there may be various *Gradations of it*, one more noxious than the other. --- Amidst an infinite Multiplicity of Sentiments, the *Outlines* may be strong and obvious, and the common *Features* may be drawn with some Resemblance; but it is impossible to catch an exact *Likeness* of all the different *Figures*, and to exhibit a just Delineation of each in one Piece, and in one determinate Point of View. Thus in what various Colours do the *Scriptures* paint this Depravity of Mind, as more or less sinful, according to the different Kinds and Circumstances of it? The Word *Heresy* ^g is in some

^f Cum Hæresis sit Venenum Ecclesiæ et quidem præsentissimum, sed tamen Hæreseos aliqui sint Gradus, et sit hæc illâ nocentior.

^g *ἀἵρεσις*, *Heresy*, is the Word generally used by *Josephus*, in speaking of the *Pharisees*, *Sadducees*, and *Essens*, the three prevailing Sects, or different Ways of philosophizing among the Jews;

Passages taken in an indifferent Sense, as relating only to a *Seet* or *Party* in Religion; as the *Seet* of the *Sadducees*, Acts v. 17. or the *Seet* of the *Pharisees*, Acts xv. 5. or that of the *Nazarenes*, Acts xxiv. 5. St. Paul, in his Epistle to the *Corinthians*, 1 Ep. xi. 19. expressly tells them, that *there must be Heresies amongst them*: This, must be, says Dr. Lightfoot, is a *sad Accent*; but it means no more, as he himself explains it, than that there certainly will be *Heresies*, not ordained by the absolute Decrees of *Providence*, but arising from the *evil Lusts and Passions* of Men, though permitted by God for this important Reason, *that they, which are approved, may be made manifest*. The same Apostle, in his Epistle to *Titus*, enlarges farther upon this Point, and describes it in a still more formidable View, c. iii. 10, 11. ^h *A Man*

Jews; and Dr. Lardner refers to the following Passages. Vide De B. J. lib. 2. c. 8. Ant. Jud. lib. 13. c. 5. 9. c. 10. 5. L. 14. c. 1. et passim. See Lardner's Testim. Book the First. Quarto.

^h αὐτοκατακριτὸν --- Nothing was more common amongst Hereticks than this *Self-condemnation*. We are told by *Eusebius*, that the Heretick *Cerdo* went into the Church, and openly confessed his Error, sometimes teaching privately, sometimes acknowledging his Error.—*Cerdo*, says *Valesius*, condemned himself, and so prevented the Sentence of the Church. Euseb. Lib. iv. c. 11. and *Tertullian* observes, that *Marcion* and *Valentinus* were excommunicated twice at least; and that *Marcion* repented at last, and would have been received into the Church, had he not been prevented by *Death*.

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that is an Heretick, says he, *after the first and second Admonition, reject, knowing that he that is such is subverted and sinneth, being condemned of himself.* --- Here the Sentence rests only upon the Decisions of Church Authority, and may be considered as not extending to every Species of an heretical Character, but to those unhappy Offenders only, who are *subverted*, and *sin* against the real Convictions of their own Consciences. And what is the Penalty to be inflicted upon them? *They are to be cut off* indeed from all Christian Communion, but not till the kind and gentle Means of reclaiming them have been tried in vain. The Offence, though great, may be washed away by *Repentance*. The *Apostle*, indeed, in another Place, ranks Heresy *amongst the Works of the Flesh*; and emphatically declares, that *they who do such Things shall not inherit the Kingdom of God*, Gal. v. 20. And St. Peter is no less severe in his Condemnation of *false Teachers*: he calls their *Doctrines damnable Heresies*, c. ii. 1. The Expression strikes with Terror; but all *Heresies* cannot be supposed to carry in them an equal Degree of Guilt, nor can it be thought that the Abettors of them will be indiscriminately consign-ed over to the same Perdition. Let the Meaning of the *Apostle* be judged from his
own

own Words. He points directly at them, and them alone, who wilfully *corrupt the Word of God*, by *denying the Lord that bought them*, and bring upon themselves *swift Destruction*.

The primitive Writers likewise do often describe Heresy as not blackened with the same Guilt, and deserving of the same Censures. *Epiphanius* in particular calls it the *Poison of Serpents*, and the *Gate of Hell*; and this Writer has left us a Catalogue of no less than eighty different Species of heretical Opinions: but it is to be observed, that he does not treat all of them with the same Spirit of Indignation. He would have been very uncharitable indeed, if he had involved all, without Distinction, in the same Gulph of inevitable Ruin. ⁱ *They are properly Hereticks*, says a learned Father, *who, when they are reprov'd for their unsound Opinions, contumaciously resist, and, instead of correcting their pernicious and damnable Doctrines, persist in the Defence of them, and leave the Church, and become her Enemies*.

ⁱ Qui in Ecclesiâ Christi morbidum aliquid pravumque sapiunt, si correpti, ut sanum rectumque sapiant, resistunt contumaciter; suaque pestifera et mortifera Dogmata emendare nolunt, sed defensare persistunt, Hæretici fiunt, et foras exeuntes, habentur in exercentibus inimicis. August. de Civ. Dei. Lib. 18. cap. 51.

Nor did the antient Discipline of the Church turn the same Edge of Resentment against all Offenders. If we look into the *Theodosian* or *Justinian Codes*, we shall find that the Laws were attempred to the several Kinds of Guilt, and the Penalties more or less severe, according to the different Degrees of Offence.

Indeed the Systems of those Times breathed a too violent and unchristian Spirit of Persecution. We cannot read without Horror the cruel *Rescripts* of *Emperors*, the *Decretals* of *Popes*, the *Decisions* of *Councils*, their *Bulls*, *Anathemas*, *Excommunications*, and all the sanguinary Measures which Church-Tyranny and Despotism too often invented. But were these thundering *Edicts* promiscuously issued out against the whole collective Body of *Hereticks* of all Denominations whatsoever? No; but upon those who were supposed to be the most dangerous Enemies of the Christian Faith, and were most obstinate and incorrigible in their Character and Conduct. Humanity was not totally lost, but even *Cruelty* itself had some tender Softenings; as *Jude* expresses it, *of some having Compassion, making a Difference* *.

* Shall we lap all, says the learned Hooker, in one Condition? Shall we cast them all headlong? Shall we plunge them all

It may be difficult indeed to draw the nice Line, and exactly to ascertain the Boundaries of Heresy, where it begins, and where it ends. Some Errors may only bear a distant Resemblance of this Sin; some may have nearer Approaches to it; and others may shew themselves in the blackest Form, *filling up the Measure of Iniquity*; and this may be said to consist in a wilful *Departure from the Faith*, from the most essential and fundamental Articles of Religion, in a *pertinacious Adherence* to Error, and with an *evil Intention* to gratify some inordinate Lust and Affection.

But to give a farther Light into this Subject, it may not be improper to take a more particular and distinct View of it, and to point out some peculiar Circumstances, which may render Errors in Religion innocent, indifferent, or sinful.

all into that infernal and everlasting *flaming lake*? them, that have been Partakers of the Errors of *Babylon*, together with them that are in the Heresy? Them, which have been the Authors of Heresy, with them that, by Terror and Violence, have been forced to receive it? Them who have taught it, with them whose Simplicity hath, by Sleights and Conveyances of *false Teachers*, been seduced to believe it? Them which have been Partakers in one, with them which have been Partakers in many? Them which, in many, with them which in all? Hooker's Disc. on Justification, p. 467.

SECT.

S E C T. III.

Errors in Religion, *which have the fairest Pretensions to Innocence, considered.*

UPON this Point, concerning the *Innocency* of Error, there has been a great Display of *Casistry*; great Pains have been taken, and a Variety of Arguments used, to wear off the Stain and Pollution of speculative Opinions, though often productive of very dangerous Effects.

The strongest *Plea* which can be made for religious Errors, is that of *unavoidable and invincible Ignorance*. If a Man, through the natural Weakness of his Understanding, be absolutely incapable of finding out Truth, in what can he be more to blame than a *blind Man*, for not having an adequate Idea of *Light* and *Colours*, or than even a *Stone* for not moving without an impulsive Force? *Impossibilities* cannot be required at our Hands. We cannot go beyond the Bounds which Nature has circumscribed; and for such Faults, which our best Endeavours could not avoid,

avoid, we cannot, in the Eye of Justice, be amenable to any Tribunal. What could be a greater Absurdity, than to punish *Children, Ideots, or Lunaticks*, for the Violation of Laws, of which they are not proper *Subjects*, and who have no Perception either of civil or moral Obligation? To the wild *untutored Indian*, whose Faculties are buried in an Abyfs of Ignorance, what are the secret Depths of Philosophy, but *like a Trumpet, which giveth an uncertain Sound?* or to him that has *neither Ears to hear*, nor Power to understand, what are the wisest Rules of Reason and Religion, but *a dead Letter* without Meaning? *Laws* imply *Promulgation*, and *Promulgation* must imply a Capacity of apprehending the Force of them; without which, *there is no Transgression.*

Thus far all *Casuits* are agreed in their Sentiments; but there are *Sins of Infirmary*, which greatly obstruct our Enquiries after Truth. Upon this Head many Difficulties have been started, and the *Schoolmen* have suggested many nice and subtle Distinctions; but it may be sufficient to consider the Difference between *Weakness* and *Wilfulness*.

How great and manifold are the common Frailties of Nature! They are born and grow up with us in every Stage of Life; and daily
Experience

Experience tells us, that intellectual as well as moral Perfection is so far from being the necessary Adjunct of Humanity, that it is no inconsiderable Part of Wisdom, to *know* that we *know* but little. *Many Qualifications*, says a late learned Writer, *are requisite to judge of some Truths, and particularly those, which are of greatest Importance; proper Learning and Penetration, Vacancy from Business, a Detachment from the Interest of all Parties, much Sincerity, and a perfect Resignation to the Government of Reason and Force of Truth; which are Things not to be reconciled with the usual Ignorance, Passions, tumultuary Lives, and other Circumstances, which carry most Men transverse*¹.

In this Embarras, what more can be required at our Hands, than an honest, disinterested, and dispassionate Love of Truth? And if, notwithstanding our best Endeavours, it be our hard Lot to fall into Error, the *Sting of Guilt* is taken away, the moral Impression is in a great Measure, if not totally expunged; and there is no Doubt but such, I may say, unavoidable Errors will meet with a kind Indulgence at the merciful and righteous Tribunal of Heaven. To this Purpose

¹ Wollaston's Religion of Nature delineated, Sect. 4. p. 62.

Salvian ^m, though he speaks of some of the Arians, observes, *that they err indeed, but they err with a good Mind; not out of any Hatred to God, but with Affection to him; thinking thereby to honour and love the Lord: though they have not the true Faith, they imagine this their Opinion to be perfect Charity towards God; and how they shall be punished for this Error of their false Opinions, no one knows but the Judge alone.* If the Principle upon which we act be good; if, as the Apostle observes, *our Hearts condemn us not, then have we Confidence towards God.* We may be the Objects of Pity, but not of Contempt; unfortunate indeed, but not criminal.

Conscience, as a Guide in Speculation as well as Action, is often considered in different Views, and with various Marks of Distinction, as being *right, erroneous, doubtful, or scrupulous.* A right and well-informed Conscience will have no other Rule of Judgment but moral Rectitude, and the infallible Word of God, the unerring Standard of all Truth.

^m Errant, sed bono animo errant; non odio, sed affectu Dei, honorare se Dominum atque amare credentes. Quamvis non habeant rectam Fidem, illi tamen hoc perfectam Dei æstimant charitatem; qualiter pro hoc ipso falsæ opinionis errore, in die judicii puniendi sunt, nullus potest scire, nisi Judex.—Salvian. de Guber. Dei, Lib. 5. p. 154.

If Men are led into Mistakes by an *erroneous Conscience*, yet even these in some Instances may not be *laid to their Charge*. When an honest, diligent and impartial Pursuit after Truth be not wanting, there certainly is a fair and reasonable Plea; and some particular Cases may be so circumstanced, that it may even become our Duty to follow the Dictates of our own Minds, though they unluckily deceive us.

Even a *doubtful or scrupulous Conscience* might not be sinful, if, instead of being governed by light, trifling, or superstitious Fears, it sincerely endeavoured to be directed by the best Evidence, and the highest Degrees of *Probability*. If Men, says the learned *Chillingworth*^a, *suffer themselves neither to be betrayed into their Errors, nor kept in them by any Sin of their Will; if they do their best Endeavours to free themselves from all Errors, and yet fail, through human Frailty, so well am I persuaded of the Goodness of God, that, if in me alone should meet a Confluence of all such Errors of all the Protestants in the World, that were thus qualified, I should not be so much afraid of them all, as I should be to ask Pardon for them.* And in another Place, he has the

^a Chill. Answer to the Preface, c. 26.

same Reflection, grounded upon the same substantial Reason : --- *To suppose*, says he, *that God obliges Men, under the Pain of Damnation, not to mistake through Error or human Frailty, is to make God a Tyrant, and to say, that he requires of us certainly to attain that End, for the attaining whereof we have no certain Means °.*

In these several Views, it appears that some Errors in Religion may be *void of Offence*; and though *materially* wrong with regard to the *Subject*, may not be *formally* wrong with respect to the *Agents*. All the moral Perfections of the Deity, and particularly his *Mercy*, which *triumphs above Judgment*, declare to us, *that he will not require Bricks, where he has not given Straw*. Our heavenly Father will be so far from being *extreme to mark what is amiss*, that he will be *always ready to pardon* his well-meaning, tho' deluded *Servants*, who act honestly under the solemn Sanction of a good and conscientious Principle : *By the Multitude of his Mercies, he will do away the Offence*.

The same Candour may perhaps be due to some *Opinions*, which are merely *speculative*, and indifferent in their Nature; which have

° Chil. c. 2. p. 104.

no Relation to moral Duty, no kind of Influence either upon our own, or upon the Actions of others, and which are generally called the *simple Errors of the Understanding*. These are Points, in which the Imagination may in some Measure be humoured with a free and open Indulgence; and in some religious Cafes, they may possibly be as harmless and inoffensive, as the wrong Solution of a *mathematical Problem*.--- These and the like *Opinions*, as Mr. *Locke* observes^p, are of so little Weight or Moment, that, like the Motes in the Sun, their Tendencies are very rarely taken notice of--- They are as it were by Chance, and the Mind lets them float at Liberty.

Truth indeed, considered abstractedly in itself, does not depend upon Consequences: the most innocent Violations of it may be an Affront to *Reason*, if not to Morality; and may cast a Blemish upon the Understandings of Men, though they are no Impeachment against their Actions: But surely a Difference ought to be made between trifling Opinions, not at all injurious to Virtue and Religion, and such as tend to corrupt and unsettle the Minds of others, to unhinge their Principles, and to become a Rock of Offence.

^p *Locke's Essay on Human Understanding*, B. 4. c. 20.

I shall only observe, that the Scriptures are certainly the wisest System of casuistical Knowledge. In this *School* of Instruction, we are taught, that the *Kingdom of God is not in Meat and Drink, in Days and Seasons*, in ritual and external Observances; but at the same time, how earnestly are we exhorted to pay a due Regard to the Interest and Edification of our Fellow-Creatures? *It is good*, says the Apostle, *neither to eat Flesh, nor to drink Wine, nor any thing whereby thy Brother stumbleth, or is offended, or is made weak.* Rom. v. 21. --- The most indifferent Errors, if the unhappy Occasions of Offence, or, I may say, even *Innocence* itself, may in some peculiar Cases be justly blameable; but on the other hand, there may be many incidental Deviations from the Truth, no more worthy of Reprehension than the common Mistakes of a *Traveller*, who happens unfortunately to miss his Road, from being himself unacquainted with all the intricate Paths, or for want of a friendly Guide to assist and conduct him to his Journey's End.

SECT.

S E C T. IV.

Other Circumstances, which, if they do not entirely obliterate, will much extenuate the Blame of religious Errors.

IN this *Class*, we may reckon those Notions which are not the original Productions of our own Hearts, but such as often proceed from casual and adventitious Causes, from foreign and borrowed Impressions, from many Snares and Temptations, that daily surround us, from an habitual Association of our Ideas, or from particular Situations or Connexions in Life, where the Danger is unforeseen, and cannot easily be guarded against.

How common is it to see Opinions carried down the *Stream* of Time, like *Straws upon the Surface*? and the farther they spread themselves, how much Strength and Influence do they gather in their Progress? Upon the common Herd of Mankind, religious Principles are, as it were, *entailed*. Both in Popish and Mahometan Countries, how venerable is *Antiquity* in the Eyes of the Multitude? and what sacred Regard do these
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blind Votaries pay to the Prescriptions of their Ancestors? Like common *Soldiers* in an Army, ever ready to follow their *Leaders*, though the plainest Sense might tell them, that the Cause for which they contend is neither consistent with Truth nor Liberty. ●

In the early Ages of Christianity, what Plea was more popular amongst the *Gentiles*, or more constant in the Mouths of the most learned *Sophists*, than that their Religion was handed down to them by a long Succession? that they trod in the Steps of their Forefathers; that the Gods had always been propitious to them; and that *Rome*, from this auspicious Influence, derived all it's Grandeur and Magnificence¹. This Apology indeed might come with some little Propriety from the ignorant common People, who were led more by their Senses, and by the Influence of Custom and Prejudice, than by the Force of Reason and Truth; but how ill did it become such wise Philosophers, as *Themistius*, *Libanius*, and others, to have no stronger Argument to urge in their Defence, for their lofty *Temples*, their *Sacrifices*, *Altars*, *Incense*,

¹ Vide Libanii Orationem pro Templis Gentilium, non exscindendis ad Theodosium Imp. et Orationem a Symmacho oblatam Nomina Senatûs. Apud Sym. et apud Ambros.

and

and all the Parade of Idolatry and Superstition, than that this was the old accustomed Road, the hallowed *Ground*, which was consecrated by their Ancestors from the first Beginning of the *Roman Empire*? When Prepossessions have once taken hold of the Affections, they make such a deep Impression, even upon whole Communities, upon the learned as well as the unlearned, that it is hard to shake off the Chains which have been long rivetted upon them. St. *Augustin* covers such *Errors of Tradition*, if I may so call them, with a Veil of Candour and Charity. *They*, says he, *who defend not a false and perverse Opinion with any pertinacious Animosity, especially if they did not, by any audacious Presumption of their own, first invent it, but received it from the Seduction of their erring Parents, and were careful in their Enquiries after Truth, being ready to embrace it when they found it, are by no Means to be reckoned amongst Hereticks* ^r.

^r Qui sententiam suam, quamvis falsam atque perversam nullâ pertinaci audaciâ defendunt, præsertim, quam non audaciâ præsumptionis suæ pepererunt, sed a seductis atque in errorem lapsis parentibus acceperunt, quærunt autem cautâ sollicitudine veritatem, corrigi parati, cum invenerint, nequaquam sunt inter hæreticos deputandi. Aug. cap. 162. ad Epist. Donat. p. 277.

In many despotick Kingdoms, there are *Errors of Compulsion*, which still lay a heavier Weight upon the Consciences of Men ; and when once their Minds have been forced to take a crooked Bent, they cannot easily grow into Straightness again. The Terrors of that horrid Tribunal, the *Inquisition*, are too well known : not only Humanity, but even Cruelty itself, looks aghast at the sanguinary Measures of Persecution. How few have Magnanimity enough to withstand so fiery a Trial *. It for a while shook the Resolution of *Husse*, of *Cranmer*, and many others the boldest Champions for the Faith. It is reasonable to think, that the primitive *Martyrs* were upheld and supported by a divine and supernatural Assistance ; but without this extraordinary Support, what an exalted Degree of Virtue and Fortitude must it require, to face Death with Alacrity and Triumph ! There have been many *Apostates* from the Faith, when driven to this horrid Extremity ; and though not justifiable in all Respects, yet they certainly had some Colour of Excuse, some little Palliation of Guilt ; and there is no

* Non omnes ad Martyrium, inquit *Erasmus*, satis habent roboris ; vereor, ne si quid inciderit tumultus, Petrum sum imitaturus. Ep. 583.

Doubt but the *Father of Mercies* will look down (if not with *the Light of his Countenance*) yet with an Eye of Pity and Compassion upon those unhappy Persons, who must either be tied to the false Religion of their Country or to the *Stake itself*, and either renounce the Truth, or seal it with their Blood.

In private as well as public Life, there are many other Circumstances, which may much extenuate the Blame of religious Errors, and may engage a kind Indulgence in their Favour, if not under the *Wings* of Truth, yet under the *Mantle of Charity*; such as a low Education and a Narrowness of Mind, which generally follows it, the Want of clear and distinct Ideas, and of Leisure and Opportunity of discerning the Agreement or Disagreement of them, especially upon nice and intricate Subjects, too sublime for common Apprehensions.

All are not capable of religious Enquiries; and many that are, must be greatly impeded in their Progress, by various Avocations, by a continual Round of necessary Business, in Arts, in Sciences, in a long Train of commercial Engagements. What different Subordinations are there in Life, more than what the civil Refinements or Delicacies of it can properly demand, but which are absolutely
necessary

necessary for the Support of Individuals, or Families, of Society? and how often must intellectual Improvements give way to the constant Labour of the Hands?

Where there are so many Obstructions in the Way of Truth, and the Minds, as well as the Bodies of Men, are thus fettered and enslaved, will not *the Judge of all the Earth do what is right?* He is no hard and unreasonable Master; but *to whom little is given, of them will not much be required.*

We may farther add, the *Delusions* to which Christians have been often exposed, through Inadvertence and Surprize, through Snares and Temptations, through the false *Speeches* and counterfeited Arts and Subtleties of Impostors. It must indeed be owned, that intemperate Zeal in the righteous Cause of Orthodoxy itself has caused some sanguine Believers to put on false Disguises, and to disgrace even *Truth*, by *pious Frauds* and fictitious *Miracles*. But it is not the Goodness of the *Cause* which will sanctify bad Measures; neither does true Religion want to be bolstered up by any artificial Means: --- it's own genuine Excellence will support it.

But Falshood has no other Prop to depend upon but mere human Policy, which too

often appears, as St. Paul describes the *Man of Sin*, after the *working of Satan*, with all *Powers and Signs, and lying Wonders, and with all Deceivableness of Unrighteousness*, 2 Thess. ix. 10.

What Numbers of deluded Christians have been drawn aside by *Lies and Frauds*, by *pretended Visions and Revelations*! But if they *sinned ignorantly*, and their best Reason could not guard against the *Wiles and Devices of false Teachers*, is it equitable to pass a harsh Sentence of Condemnation upon them? May they not say, as *Eve* did, that the *Serpent beguiled them*? There is an unhappy Weakness and Credulity, almost natural to some Minds, which render them an easy Prey to the insidious Schemes of artful and designing Men; who are *brought in unawares*, and *come in privily to spy out our Liberty*. For such deluded Victims, the *Church of Rome* makes no Allowances. It's whole System is pointed with Severity. Even the great *Tillemont*, though contrary to the natural Bent of his Temper, was soured by his Religion, and often went out of his Way to consign *Hereticks* to Damnation. To this rigid Asperity of Sentiment, how directly contrary is the mild Genius of Christianity? In the Spirit of Charity, the

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Scriptures tell us, that *God winked at the Times of Ignorance, and that as many as have sinned without Law shall also perish without Law*; and many of the first Defenders of the Faith, such as *Justin Martyr* and *Clemens Alexandrinus*, had such charitable and generous Sentiments of the divine Benignity, that they entertained the most favourable Thoughts even of the *Pagan World*, especially of those, who, like *Socrates*, lived up to the Dictates of naked and unassisted Reason.

We cannot indeed precisely ascertain the Measures of the divine Love: *his Judgments are a great Deep*; but we know that he is a *God*, as the Prophet describes him, *ready to pardon, gracious and merciful, slow to Anger, and of great Kindness*. Neh. ix. 17.

Happy would it be for Man, if he had no other Frailties and Infirmities, than those sudden and inadvertent Slips, which our *Liturgy* calls, our *Negligences and Ignorances*; and that he had no other Faults than those *secret* ones, of which his Memory, (though a faithful Register of great Crimes) cannot possibly retain any certain Traces, and from which he may be cleansed, through the Mercy of God, by a general *Repentance*.

But

But our next View will shew a more unfavourable Aspect of him ; more disfigured and corrupt in his Faculties, more determined and deliberate in his Principles, which are not only more heinous in their Nature, but draw after them a Train of more pernicious Consequences.

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S E C T. V.

Errors in Religion, which are attended with the greatest Aggravations of Guilt, and are productive of the most dangerous and fatal Effects.

AND here I would not be thought to blacken the Character of the *Heretick*, or to load him with unjust Aspersions; much less in *the Spirit of Elias*, to call down Fire from Heaven upon his Head. How inconsistent would this be with Reason, Liberty, Humanity, and the very Characteristick of a Protestant? A *Freedom of Enquiry* is the Foundation upon which we build our own Principles, and the happy and unmolested Enjoyment of them; and far be it from us to bury others in the Ruins of that *Fabrick*, which is our own Glory and Security.

But, on the other Hand, let us not *speake smooth Things*, nor prophesy Deceits, saying, *Peace, Peace*, when the *Mischiefs of our Mother Jezebel* are so many; when the Church is beset on every Side with such a Multiplicity of Heretical Opinions, so destructive of
true

true Religion, and the real Happiness of Man.

The *Heretick* has not yet been described in his full Dimensions. There are other great Aggravations of his Sin, which still render it *more exceeding sinful*.

The *Founders* of *Heresy* are certainly more blameable than their Followers. The spurious Production derived it's Birth from the one, but was only nursed and reared by the Hands of the other. It was the original *Parent* that gave it *Name*; and without him, the ill-favoured *Offspring* had never shewed it's Face, nor disturbed the Peace of the Church. We find, that in the early Ages of Christianity, a greater Mark of Infamy was generally set upon the *Heresiarch* than upon the *Heretick*; a remarkable Instance of which there was in the *Church of Africk*, when there was a Matter of Dispute to be decided between *Cecilian* and *Donatus*: the Partizans of the one, though ordained out of the *Catholick Church*, were, upon Repentance, re-admitted to the *clerical Function*; but the greatest Censure, without all Hopes of Resitution, fell upon *Donatus*, as the principal Author of the *Schism* ^t.

^t Hoc ergo istos ab initio servavit Africa Catholica ex episcoporum sententiâ, qui in ecclesiâ Romanâ inter Cæcilianum

All Hereticks are not to be put upon the same Level; but their Guilt may be more or less heightened by various Circumstances; not only by their Principles, but the Means made Use of in the Propagation of them. How many Aggravations do we see in the Character and Conduct of *Simon Magus*? He not only spread the Poison of his Heresy, but he was stung with Envy and Ambition: he personally attacked the Apostles; he endeavoured to corrupt them with Bribes; he tried to purchase the Gift of the Holy Ghost by the Imposition of Hands; and when he failed in this blasphemous Attempt, he had Recourse to many diabolical Tricks and magical *Illusions*. He was wanting in no Pains to make *Profelytes* to *Unrighteousness*; he drew Crouds of Followers after him at *Samaria*, at *Tyre*, and *Rome* itself. And what was the Result of all his wonderful Feats? When he had brought them to the highest Pitch of Impiety, they were all dashed at once, and terminated in the Destruction of the Impostor.

et partem Donati judicaverunt, damnatoque uno quodam Donato, qui auctor schismatis fuisse manifestatus est, cæteros correctos, etiamsi extrâ ecclesiam ordinati essent, in suis honoribus suscipiendos esse censuerunt. Aug. Ep. 50. p. 67.

All Heresies generally spring from the same corrupt Fountain; that of *an evil Heart of Unbelief*; but the *Streams* which flow from it are not equally foul and polluted. What can more enhance the Crime of false Religions, than the civil Disguises they often put on? They are generally aggravated by all the Signatures of Fraud and Imposture: and to ape the true Miracles of Christ and his Apostles, what has been more common amongst Hereticks and Unbelievers in all Ages, than a vain Pretension to the same supernatural Gifts? Though they really differ as much as base and adulterated Coin from the purest Gold; yet this Wonder-working Trade was much affected by the Gentiles; and it was a remarkable Question proposed to *Justin Martyr* ^u, If Miracles are a distinguishing Criterion of Orthodoxy, why did God permit them to be wrought in the Church of Hereticks? This Spirit of Delusion continued more or less in every Age of the Church; and when Popery enlarged it's Boundaries, what wonderful Things are said to be done at the Shrines of pretended *Martyrs*! Read but the Lives of the Saints, (if Patience will permit)

^u Justin Martyris Quæstio et Responsio ad Orthodox. — Quæst. 5. p. 394.

of St. *Raymond*, St. *Francis*, St. *Agnes*, St. *Clara*, St. *Rosa*, St. *Winifred*, and many others; and what strange and extravagant Stories will you meet with, beyond the Fictions of *Romance* itself! They not only exceed it in the Improbability of Circumstances, but in the Dullness of Narration: nor are the *Cures* supposed to be wrought at the Tomb of the *Abbe de Paris* less monstrous and ridiculous. One would think that the wildest Imagination, and the most bigotted Enthusiasm, could hardly sink into such Credulity and Ignorance. This is a Scene of Wonders indeed, and may be called, not, as *Bellarmino* pretends, a distinguishing Note of a true Church, but a Superfetation of Errors, an accumulated Heap of *Imposture upon Imposture*; and what can be stronger Proofs of Hypocrisy as well as Impiety, than to employ Reason and Religion, which are the Arms of Heaven, as Instruments in Support of the Kingdom of Darkness?

Nor are these the only *Weapons* which have been frequently made Use of, in Defence of the most absurd and erroneous Opinions, no less injurious to Reason than to Religion itself. How often have all the *Engines* of Tyranny and Persecution been set at Work, in Opposition to Truth, and in Vin-

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dication

dication of many antichristian Principles? The antient History of the Church furnishes us with abundant Proofs of this: almost the whole Train of *Hereticks*, such as the *Gnosticks*, the *Donatists*, the *Arians*, whenever it was in their Power, lost no Opportunity of oppressing their Opponents, even by the most violent and sanguinary Measures. * *Athanasius*, as the learned *Hooker* observes, *by the Space of forty-six Years, from the Time of his Consecration to succeed Alexander, Archbishop in the Church of Alexandria, till the last Hour of his Life, was never suffered to enjoy the Comfort of a peaceable Day. Julian* indeed pretended to great Moderation; but under this false Masque, he behaved as a fiery Zealot against Christians, especially against the *Presidents* of Churches, who had the greatest Weight and Influence with the People, such as *Athanasius*, *Eleusius* of *Cyzicum*, and *Titus* of *Bosra*; all of them, as *Dr. Lardner* observes, *Men of great Distinction* †.

It would be too tedious to give a long Detail of the violent Spirit of *Hereticks* in the several Ages of the Church; almost every Page of *ecclesiastical History* is blotted with it; but let it suffice only to mention the Annals

* *Hooker*, B. 5. p. 172.

† *Dr. Lardner's Collection of J. and H. Testimonies*, Vol. IV. p. 110. Quarto.

of the *Reformation*, which, in the whole Progress of it, were stained with Blood. Our *first Reformers* aimed at nothing more than a free Enjoyment of their Religion, according to the Purity and Simplicity of the Gospel; but there were no Softenings of Mercy, no Relentings in the Breasts of their inhuman and intolerant Persecutors.

It may be asked, perhaps, by some Objectors, whether *Orthodoxy* itself has not exerted the same coercive Measures of Tyranny and Oppression? It cannot be denied; but Men's Passions are apt to burn with a stronger Flame in the Cause of Falshood than that of Truth. What is wanting in Knowledge, is supplied by an enthusiastick Zeal, the chief Support of heretical Opinions. In answer to this, perhaps we may be told, that there cannot be greater Monuments of Cruelty than the bloody *Crusades*, which were carried on by the Confederate Union of Christian Princes. But who were they? not the Defenders of the true Faith; not the Followers of the meek and humble Jesus, but overheated Zealots, irritated and inflamed by their spiritual and lordly Masters *over the Heritage of God*. A true Christian will be restrained by the genuine Principles of his Religion, as well as the tender Sentiments of Nature; but the

the Fury of false Religion is seldom appeased till *Faith* is turned into *Faction*, and the whole *Body of Christ* is torn in Pieces.

Many other Circumstances might be mentioned, which greatly aggravate the Guilt of *Herefy*; but these will appear in a fuller View, when we trace the original *Sources* of it, and the foul *Channels* through which it directs it's Course.

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S E C T. VI.

The principal Causes of Errors in Religion, arising from Ignorance, Indolence, Credulity, and Superstition.

THE Causes of *religious Errors* stand so thick about us, that it is hard to know which to place in the foremost Rank.

Perhaps *Ignorance* may claim the Right of *Precedence*, upon the Account of it's great *Antiquity*, and the wide and baleful Spread of it's Influence: almost every *Atmosphere* may be said to be darkened by it's heavy Clouds.

What a small Share of Reason have the common Herd of Mankind to guide them? and the little Portion they have, how seldom do they employ in serious, useful, and important Reflections? So far are they from *searching the Scriptures*, from *meditating upon them*, and *examining themselves, whether they are in the Faith*, that they take up their Religion at a Venture, like a common *Merchandise* upon Trust, and a Kind of wholesale Credit.

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In the first Infancy of the Gospel, Arts and Sciences flourished, and many were eminently distinguished for their Wit and Learning. But what was the Pride of *Philosophy*, and all these boasted Treasures of Erudition? in some Respects worse than *Ignorance itself*; so far from opening the Way to true Knowledge, that they often blocked up the fairest Avenues to it, and became greater *Foolishness with God* than the Simplicity of the Poor, who *had the Gospel preached unto them*. We cannot have a very high Opinion of this worldly *Wisdom*, if we judge of it from the *Fragments* which are left us, or from the Testimonies of many Writers of undoubted Truth and Fidelity. What a remarkable Account does *Lactantius* give us of one *anonymous Author*, who figured high in the Opinion of the World? We are told, that when *he came to confute the Religion, against which he was arguing, he appeared very contemptible, not knowing what he opposed, nor what to say; so that our People in general, though upon account of the Times they might think it best to say little, could not but despise him, and look upon him as a Man who attempted to enlighten others, when he was blind himself; and to bring others back from Error, when he was himself ignorant, and knew not where to set his Feet; and to teach others*

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others the Truth, of which he never had a glimpse himself^a.

It may be said, perhaps, that most of the Writings of these early Ages are now lost and buried in Oblivion; but how is this Loss to be accounted for? Ought it to be imputed to the Malice of Christians? Was it a wilful *Spoliation*? If we may rely upon the Testimony of *Chrysostom*, he assigns a much more easy and natural Cause. --- He tells us, that *the Books^b written against Christianity were so contemptible, that they had been all in a manner lost long ago: many of them perished almost as soon as they appeared; but, if they are still to be found any where, it is amongst the Christians.*

These perhaps may be looked upon as too invidious Reflections upon the Characters of Men, who, though Enemies to the Gospel, have certainly discovered a great Brilliancy of Wit, as well as Depth of Learning.

But what rare Instances are there, where Learning and Infidelity join Hand in Hand

^a Lactan. Inst. L. 5. c. 2.

^b Ἀλλὰ τοσούτος ἴσι τῶν ὑπ' αὐτῶν γεγραμμένων ὁ γίλως, ὥστε ἀφανισθῆναι καὶ τὰ βιβλία πάλαι, καὶ ἄμα τῷ δειχθῆναι, καὶ ἀπολείδαι τὰ πολλὰ. Εἰ δὲ πᾶσι καὶ ἰουδαίῳ διασωθῇ, παρὰ Χριστιανοῖς τὸ το σῶζομενον ἔνιοι τίς ἂν. DeS. Bab. Ora. 2. Tom. ii. p. 539. Bened. Ed.

and figure in the same Circle? Notwithstanding the Exceptions of a few, it will be generally found, that *Ignorance* is the common *Mother* of most Heresies; and that *Indolence* is the genuine *Offspring* descended from her, which wears the same Features, and is too often productive of the same unhappy Brood of erroneous Opinions: for what Fruit can reasonably be expected from the barren *Field* of the *slothful*, and the uncultivated *Vineyard* of the *Man* void of *Understanding*. *I went by it, says Solomon, and lo! it was all grown over with Thorns, and Nettles covered the Face thereof.* Prov. xxiv. 31.

In the same Soil, blind *Credulity* generally springs up, and, like a *corrupt Tree*, what does it produce but a wild Exuberance of Errors? Ask the credulous Man why he believes, and what is the *Reason of the Hope that is in him*? He forms his Judgment at Random; more from the Sound than the Sense of Words; more from disjointed and unconnected Sentences, than from any rational and well-grounded Evidences of Truth. Why has this foolish Votary any Faith in *Mysteries*? only because they are mysterious. And why is he fond of *Heterodoxy*? only because it is the *Idol* which his Heart casually adored.

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In this *Train*, *Superstition* seldom fails to follow, as the *Shadow* does the *Body*; and in what Form does it lead up the Rear? with all the Horrors of black *Despair*, trembling on the Brink of Danger and Destruction. What can be a more miserable deluded Creature upon Earth, than the superstitious Man, who strives to purify his *Mind* by the *Torture* of his *Body*? Who is so blind a *Devotee*, as to lay greater Strefs upon *Pilgrimages*, *Penances* and *Mortifications* of the *Flesh*, than upon the vital and spiritual Parts of Religion, in which the true *Kingdom of God* consists?

These Causes of religious Errors, *Ignorance*, *Indolence*, *Credulity*, and *Superstition*, not only act separately, but often operate by their united Influence. It was by their joint Concurrence that the *Hierarchy* of the Church of *Rome* was raised to such an enormous Height. For though it was begun and carried on by the unremitting Labour and Ambition of crafty and designing Men; yet it was the supine Vassalage of the ignorant and deluded Multitude, that propped the whole *Superstructure*, and enabled it to rise even above all that is called *God*.

How many favourite Doctrines of this Church, such as *Transubstantiation*, *Purgatory*, the *seven Sacraments*, the *Invocation of*

Saints, Masses, Indulgencies, and many others, derived (if not their Birth) yet their Progress and Success, from *implicit Faith* and *passive Obedience*, the most unthinking and enslaving Principles of human Nature ! Even the *Mahometan Religion*, though supported by the *Sword*, could not have gained such rapid Conquests, if the Souls of Men had not been first subdued, and in some Measure fitted for the *Yoke*. The *Pagan Arabs* would have fell an easy Victim to almost any Impostor. The *Roman and Persian Monarchies* were then weak and declining in Knowledge, as well as Strength ; and when Ignorance and Credulity paved the Way, the Victory was more than half gained ; and nothing was wanting to compleat it's Triumphs, but the bold and undaunted Spirit of the pretended Prophet. By these Instances we see, that the most noxious Plants (though they are not of our *heavenly Father's planting*) too often grow up and flourish, when their Fibres are strengthened by the foul Dregs of Superstition.

Indeed in these enlightened Times, Men are not so easily carried down the Stream of *Ignorance* ; even the common *Mechanick* is better seen in the Principles of Religion, than the *Monks and Friars*, and sanctified *Recluses* of the Church of Rome. This Revival

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val of Learning does Honour to Christianity, brightens the Evidences of it, enables it's learned Advocates to answer the futil Objections of Hereticks and Unbelievers, and to *put to Silence the Ignorance of foolish Men.*

But it is to be feared in a licentious Age, that what is gained in Knowledge, is too often lost in *Principle*. When the *Heart* is corrupted, and the Poison of *Heresy* has insinuated itself into the very *Veins*, into the inward Frame and Constitution of Man, what *Antidote* can prevail against it? What can human Wisdom do towards curing a Disease so fixed and inveterate? But this brings to Mind some other Sources of that heretical Depravity, which too much prevails, and spreads it's malignant Influence amongst us.

S E C T. VII.

Other Causes of Errors in Religion, arising from Pride, Passion, Prejudice, and Prepossession.

THESE, like *Confederates* in the same Cause, generally go hand in hand together. They are connected by an *Association* of Ideas; and the least Touches of the one will often excite some sensible Feelings and Emotions of the other.

The proud Man's Knowledge *puffeth up*; and his chief Aim is not a sober and disinterested Love of Truth, but the Desire of Gain or Conquest; or the Gratifications of his *Lusts* and *Passions*, are the first Springs and ruling Motives of his Heart. The more his Ambition aspires above his Reach, and the more he *catches at the Clouds*, the more low and grovelling are his Sentiments, beneath the Dignity of a rational Creature.

It is the hard Fate of this Man, that he has no Place for Retreat. He is too wise to be convinced, and too proud to be reformed; and which is worse, his high Conceptions

tions of himself exclude all Dependence upon God, who is the *great Giver of all Knowledge*.

To the *meek*, *Mysteries* are revealed; but it is emphatically said of God, that he *resisteth the proud, and giveth Grace to the lowly*. What was it but a supercilious Arrogance of Mind, which caused *Celsus* ^c to cast such foul Aspersions upon all Christians? He greedily caught at the Errors of the most formal Hereticks, and in the Pride of *Boasting*, he made them the Topicks of Reproach against true Believers. In one remarkable Passage, he does not scruple to say, that he *knew all Things*. What Vain-glory was this, to lay a Claim to universal Knowledge! But suppose he only meant the Things relating to Christians; how much do the Words favour of Vanity and Self-conceit, as well as Scorn and Derision?

Nor does *Porphyry* fall short of him, either in his high Opinion of himself, or in his inveterate Hatred and Rancour against Christians. *St. Augustin* has given us a just and true Character of him. *If this Man*, says he, meaning *Porphyry*, *had loved Wisdom truly and faithfully, he would have had a better Know-*

^c Origen. contra Celsum, p. 11.

ledge of Christ, the Power of God, and the Wisdom of God; nor, being puffed up with the Pride of vain Science, would he have revolted from the Humility of Christ ^a.

But without going so far back for Instances of this Nature, what strong Specimens of Pride are set before us in almost the whole Class of Unbelievers? When we read the political Disquisitions of a noble Author, who may be called the modern *Oracle of Infidelity*, how justly do we admire the animated Force and Boldness of his Language, the Quickness and Liveliness of his Imagination, and the Elegance as well as Sublimity of his Sentiments! But when he touches upon Religion, how greatly does his *Genius* fail him! His finest Colours are but the meretricious Ornaments of Falshood, debased by Pride, and disfigured with Ostentation. Behold him now, with an affected Air of Sovereignty, *sitting in the Seat of the Scornful*, and looking down with supercilious Contempt upon the

^a *Quam sapientiam, si verè ac fideliter amàsses, Christum Dei virtutem ac Dei sapientiam cognovisses, nec ab ejus saluberrimâ humilitate, tumore inflatus vanæ scientiæ resiliisses. Aug. de Civ. Dei, L. 10. c. 26. — These words are considered by some, as implying, that Porphyry was originally a Christian; but they are not understood in that Sense by Tillamont, Lardner, and others, but only as importing, that he was too proud to be a Christian.*

most amiable and illustrious Characters of all Antiquity, upon ^e *Socrates, Plato, Aristotle*, and, as far as it comes in his Way, upon the whole learned World. And such are *his high Imaginations*, that he treats the whole System of modern Philosophy with the most severe and bitter *Invectives*, beyond the Bounds of common Decency. Even his favourite *Locke*, (though he deigns upon some Occasions to speak respectfully of him) cannot always escape his Censure. But, above all others, the chief Mark at which he shoots his *Arrows* are Christian Divines, whom he stigmatizes with every disgraceful *Epithet* and vile Asperision which his pregnant Wit can invent, or the utmost Malice bestow.

He charges them with *Blasphemy, with Madnefs, and worse than Madnefs, as being the most presumptuous of all Fools, in Alliance with the Atheists, and as betraying the Cause of God*. What vain Triumphs are these? Even the *Humility* of a Christian adorns human Nature with more Wisdom, and, I may say, exalts it with more Dignity.

^e Bolingbroke's Works, Vol. III. p. 337, 338. 392. Vol. IV. p. 129. 273. 586. Vol. V. p. 188, 493.

We may farther observe, that *Pride* seldom stands by itself, without the Concomitancy of *Passion*, which is another Obstacle to true Knowledge. The wise Author of Nature has implanted *Passions* in the human Breast for many great and excellent Ends, to invigorate our Nature, to quicken the animal Spirits, to enliven the Fancy, and to give *Wings* to our Pursuits in Speculation as well as Action. If not animated by these Springs and Emotions of the Mind, the chief Spirit and Energy of the human Frame would be lost, and we should scarce be awake.

But when the Reins are let loose, and the *Passions* are not kept in a due Subordination to Reason, how apt are they to run riot from their true Centre without any appointed *Orb* to direct their Motions? When irregular Desires, and inordinate Appetites, get the Dominion, the whole Man is driven away as with a *Tempest*, and his rational Faculties, his Understanding and Judgment, are given up as *a Prey to strong Delusions to believe a Lie*.

Prejudice and *Prepossession*, which are other Causes of religious Errors, generally take the same unruly Course: and what Freedom can the Mind enjoy, or with what Authority can
it

it act, under such arbitrary and tyrannical Masters ?

Prejudice, like a *jaundiced Eye*, discolours Truth, and darkens the fairest Evidences of it ; and *Prepossession* often gives a favourable Aspect, though in a false *Glass*, to Deformity itself.

The Mind, thus vitiated in it's Taste, and under such unhappy Influence, is distorted, sees Things through a wrong *Medium* ; and can no more find it's Way through the intricate Mazes of Error, than a common Traveller, when the true Road is blocked up with Dangers and Difficulties ; but the wrong Path lies open before him, and is not only clear of all Obstructions, but has the Appearance of many agreeable Objects, many alluring Snares and Temptations to deceive him.

In *Pagan*, *Popish*, and *Mahometan* Countries, we see the irresistible Force of false Impressions. What a commanding and overruling Sway do they bear over whole Communities of Men, the learned as well as the unlearned ? There hardly is a more epidemical Disease than Prejudice : when once the Minds of Men are corrupted by it, the Contagion is apt to spread itself more and

more ; and neither Reason nor Religion, though the best *Antidotes* against it, can expel the *Poison*, or operate with effectual Security and Success, which will appear more fully under the following Section.

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S E C T. VIII.

Others Causes of Errors in Religion, arising from Education, Custom, Authority, and other Connexions.

THESE likewise have a near Relation to each other. The *Stamp* which Education gives is often indelible. The first Impression is the strongest, and cannot easily be worn out. The human Mind, in it's first Opening, is soft and pliable ; and good Principles may be insinuated into it almost imperceptibly. The *Soil* is then in the best Temper to receive the good *Seed*, to cherish and keep it, and to *bring forth Fruit with Patience*.

But when evil Principles have taken Hold of the Affections, and the Chains are firmly rivetted, how hard is it to break *these Bonds asunder* ? and to set the Mind at Liberty, when it is once *entangled in the Bondage of Corruption* ? We cannot have a stronger Proof of this Inflexibility of Mind, than in the Character and Conduct of the *Jews*. They were of the *Seed of Abraham*, to whom *per-
tained*

tained the Adoption, and the Glory, and the Covenants, and the giving of the Law, and the Service of God, and the Promises. Rom. ix. 4. But other Nations were to them as Aliens from the Commonwealth of Israel, having no Hope, and without God in the World. Eph. ii. 12. This stubborn Generation could no more renounce these high Privileges, so flattering to human Nature, than they could cut off a right Hand, or pluck out a right Eye. Though our Lord came not to destroy the Law and the Prophets, but to fulfil; and though his Religion had all the Marks and Characters of a divine Authority; yet the Jews were hardened against Conviction, and, like the deaf Adder, they stopped their Ears.

Nor was the same obstinate Spirit, as was before intimated, less predominant amongst the Gentiles: they could not forego their sumptuous Temples, their Altars, Oracles, Incense, and Sacrifices; much less could they renounce their tutelary Deities, the Bulwarks of all their Hopes, and the Guardians of all their Happiness. Many of the wise and learned, who were bred up in the celebrated Schools of Philosophy, could as soon forsake themselves, as the old Principles of their Masters. Even the later *Platonicks*, who had favourable Leanings towards Christianity, often

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often intermixed it with *allegorical Interpretations*; and even *Origen* himself indulged the same Humour, though he was a strenuous Advocate for the Truths of the Gospel.

To such pre-conceived Impressions, *Custom* adds great Weight and Influence, and may not improperly be called a kind of *second Nature*. In the common Affairs of Life, long accustomed Habits gather Strength by Time; but, especially in Religion, it is looked upon as a kind of *Sacrilege* to violate the established Laws of the Country, even in the most indifferent Things. Even Infidels themselves have their *Creeds*; and the longer they have been habituated to their own favourite Systems, the more pertinacious they often are in their Adherence to them.

We find indeed, that some are *tossed to and fro, like the Waves of the Sea*, revolting from Truth to Falshood, and from Falshood to Truth. The Emperor *Julian*^f was a re-

^f *Ammianus Marcellinus* gives this Account of *Julian*: Et quanquàm a rudimentis pueritiæ inclinatio erat, erga numinum cultum paullatimque adolescens desiderio rei flagrabat, multa metuens tamen agitabat quædam ad id pertinentia, quantum fieri poterat occultissimè; ubi verò abolitis, quæ verebatur, adesse liberum tempus faciendi, quæ vellet, advertit, sui pectoris patefecit arcana, et planis absolutisque decretis; aperiri templa, arisque hostias admoveri ad deorum statuit cultum. Lib. 22. cap. 5.

markable Instance of the former. He was bred up in Christian Principles, and under Christian Parents as well as Masters; but still he apostatized from the Faith, and became the great Protector of *Gentilism*. But many Reasons may perhaps be assigned for this extraordinary Conduct. When he turned away from the Religion of Jesus, he was not more than twenty Years of Age--a Season of Youth too impatient of Restraint. He had frequent Converse with Heathen Philosophers, and particularly, *Libanius*, who taught him *Rhetorick*, was high in his Esteem---Or perhaps his Vanity might be touched by the outward Pomp and Splendor of Pagan Rites and Ceremonies---Or he might think this the most extensive *Sphere* for the Exertion of his great Abilities: he might fancy it perhaps beneath the Dignity of an Emperor to be cloathed with Christian Humility. Whatever were his Motives, he well knew the Force and Influence of Education and Custom, and would not permit the Children of the *Galileans*, as he was used to call them, to be instructed in the liberal Arts under the Tuition of any but *Greek Masters*, lest, by being grounded in the Principles of the Christian Religion, they might be the better able to combat the Worship of *false Gods*.

But

But if Men are not led into Error by the gentle Means of Persuasion, or by the prevailing Force of *Custom*, how often are they drawn into it, and compelled to come in by the mere Dint of *Authority*. When can Religion be in a more deplorable State, than when the Arm of the *Magistrate* is made bare against her, and erroneous Opinions are allowed to take Shelter under his *Wings*? How often has this been the unhappy Fate of Christians, both under *Pagan* and *Papish Rome*, both Persecutors of the true Faith, and like the *Woman* mentioned in the *Apocalypse*, *drunken with the Blood of the Saints, and with the Blood of the Martyrs of Jesus*? Rev. xvii. 6. How many distressed Souls (that their Bodies might not fall a Sacrifice) have been forced into the most glaring Errors and Absurdities, and through the impending Terrors of Persecution, to assent even to *Transubstantiation* itself?

But the primitive Church made a just Distinction between those that *voluntarily erred*, and *those* that were frightened into Error by *Threats* and *Punishment*: and in this latter Case, *Bishops* * were often allowed, and par-

* Qui ad iterandum Baptismum, vel metu coacti sunt, vel terrore traducti, his ea custodienda est moderatio, &c. *Leo*, Ep. 77. ad Nicetam, cap. 6.

ticularly the *Bishop of Aquileia*, by the Direction of Pope *Leo himself*, to moderate their *Penance*, and to reinstate those in the Communion of the *Church*, who were driven out of it by Force and Compulsion.

Sometimes the *Smiles* of secular Authority, without the *Frowns* of it, have imposed upon the Consciences of Men, and have drawn them into heterodox Opinions, through a passive Submission to the Dictates of publick Wisdom.

Many likewise have been betrayed and led astray by their private and social Connexions in Life. There are Confederacies amongst *Hereticks*, *Scismaticks*, and *Unbelievers*. Each have their Cause; and when formed into Parties, how determined are they to stand by each other at all Adventures! When once the Minds of Men are inflamed with Zeal, with *Bigotry* or *Enthusiasm*, the fiery Spirit seldom abates; it catches from one to the other, and spreads itself through the whole Circle.

As there are many different *Seets*, even amongst well meaning *Christians*, how sacred is the *Bond of Union* betwixt them! how inviolably are they bound together in the same Sentiments and the same Affections!

But especially the unwary and unthinking Part of Mankind are not left to their own
Choice.

Choice. They often lump their Religion in the gross, and make a wholesale *Merchandise of their Faith*. They believe, either as the *Church* or *Conventicle* directs, and all is swallowed at random, whether the *Husks of the Swine*, or the heavenly *Bread of Life*. No Difference is made between *Vessels of Honour* and *Vessels of Dishonour*, between *Wood*, *Hay and Stubble*, and *Gold and Silver, and precious Stones*.

Indeed the Sources of Error are almost infinite. They depend not only upon the outward Connections, but upon the various Humours and Dispositions of Men. Let it suffice to mention a few others, lest a longer Detail of them might be too tedious to the *Reader*, as well as to the *Author*.

S E C T. IX.

Other Causes of Religious Errors, arising from an heretical Turn of Mind, from a Fondness for Innovation, from peculiar systematical Principles, and above all, from Vice and Immorality.

HERE likewise there may be some Coherence: the one is often productive of the other.

The Conduct of some *Hereticks* is really unaccountable; and it is hard to know upon what Motives or Principles they act; they seem to be *born* with a kind of *mental Obliquity*, and to be as it were mechanically formed with a peculiar Turn for *heretical Opinions*; like the *bodily Eye*, when distorted in it's Sight, they generally look the wrong Way.

We will not pretend to say that this Oddity of Sentiment proceeds from an *organical Structure* of the *Brain*; but it is a strange *Singularity* of Mind, as though it was naturally interwoven in the very Frame and Complexion of some Persons.

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These *constitutional* Hereticks, if I may so call them, are seldom to be wrought upon by any Arguments whatsoever. They would monopolize all Reason to themselves; they are too *sceptical* to be convinced, but too *dogmatical* to allow of any Contradiction.

What a *Fondness* for *Innovation* may we generally discover in Persons of this peculiar Cast? Instead of *asking for the old Paths*, and *walking therein*, no Way is pleasing to them, but that which is chalked out by themselves; and, for *Novelty* Sake alone, the more it diverts from the common and beaten *Track*, the more they rejoice in it, as their own *Invention*.

This Love for *new* Opinions indeed has been often cast, as a *Matter* of Reproach, in the Face of all Protestants whatsoever. How often has that stale Question been asked, and with what an Air of great Importance, *Where was your Religion before Luther?* A Question still repeated with great Pertness, tho' the most substantial Answers have over and over been given to it. It is sufficient to observe, that the Doctrines of the *Reformation* are as old as *Christianity* itself. They were maintained by Christ and his Apostles, by the primitive Writers, by the best Christian Apologists, and indeed by some the most learned

learned Men in every *Century*, even in the most corrupt Times of Popery itself. The Principles of Protestantism were not founded upon human Inventions and *unwritten Traditions*, but upon a sufficient and perfect Rule of Faith, upon the *Word of God* himself, the unerring Standard of all Truth. Here is laid *no other Foundation than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ*.

Let the Reader therefore judge, in which Scale the Charge of *Novelty* lies, whether in the Church of *Rome*, or in the Doctrines of *Protestants*. The Romish Doctors indeed have, in this Instance, acted with great Policy, by endeavouring to keep the Scriptures as much as possible out of publick View, and by corrupting the *Fathers* by an *Index Expurgatorius*, by unwarranted Interpolations, by forged Additions, and false Retrenchments. This was a subtle Way of getting rid of all standing and publick Monuments of Reproach; but Protestant Churches have *not so learned Christ*; they appeal to the *Law and to the Testimony*, and to the pure and uncorrupted Records of Antiquity; and upon this fair Examination it will appear, that we have no futil *Innovations* contrary to the Scriptures, no new-modelled Systems, but such only as are built upon the *Foundation of the Apostles*
and

and Prophets, *Jesus Christ himself being the chief Corner Stone.* In a Word, the Church of Rome, by her novel Inventions, as the Prophet said of Tyre, has *stained the Pride of all her Glory*; but the *pure and undefiled Religion* of Protestants stands in need of no false Disguises, no adulterated Mixtures to enforce and recommend it.

It may justly be observed, that most *Novelists* in Religion, as well as Philosophy, have a peculiar Fondness for their own *systematick Principles*. No Opinions will please but their own ill-favoured *Brood*, hatched by themselves. To these false Idols they *bow the Knee*, as to *Baal*; and will sacrifice all, even Truth itself, for the Honour of these darling Objects of their own Hearts.

What abundant Specimens have we of this Kind in almost the whole Tribe of *heretical Writers*! When wrong Ideas are once fixed in the Mind, such as the *All-sufficiency* of human Reason, the *Eternity of Matter*, the No-necessity of one supreme independent Cause, the Unconcernedness of Providence in the Affairs of this lower World, the indifferent and unconnected *Relations* of Virtue and Vice, the *Materiality* of the human Soul, or the *Annihilation* of both Soul and Body after Death; what just Reasonings can be drawn
from

from such ill-grounded Premises? *Light* may as soon be struck out of *Darkness*, as Truth from such preconceived, but ill-formed, Hypotheses; contrary to all rational Evidence, and to the plainest Dictates of common Sense.

There is such a Multitude of Errors in Religion, that it is almost impossible to trace all the various Sources of them; but having touched upon the principal of them, I shall only add one more Cause of erroneous Opinions, and indeed it is the most fatal and predominant of all; I need not say, that I mean a wicked and profligate Life.

Vice and *Immorality* are the Bane of all Truth; and so repugnant to all the Principles of Christianity, that a wicked Man will naturally love *Darkness* rather than *Light*, because his Deeds are evil.

Truth and *Virtue* are faithful, and almost inseparable Companions: they nearly correspond in the same Harmony of Sentiment, in their Views and Tendencies, their Means and Motives, their ultimate Ends and Designs, and to the mutual Advantage of each other. But what an unhappy *Alliance* is there between *Vice* and *Folly*? They are Confederates in the most abandoned Cause, are miserably linked together in the same Chain,

Chain, and in Pursuit of the same inordinate Measures.

What can be a more indissoluble *Bond* of *Friendship*, than to have the same *Inclinations* and the same *Aversions*? Into a *malicious Soul* *Wisdom* cannot enter: all the *Avenues* are blocked up; and for so divine and heavenly a Guest, no Opening, no kind Reception can be had, especially in the *Tents of Ungodliness*; for, as the Apostle observes, *What Fellowship has Righteousness with Unrighteousness? and what Communion has Light with Darkness? and what Concord has Christ with Belial?* or *what Part has he that believeth, with the Heretick or Infidel?* 2 Cor. vi. 14, 15.

That this Account may not seem to be too much exaggerated; that the Colourings may not be thought to be too deep or strong; it may not be improper to exemplify what has been said, by an Induction of Particulars.

S E C T. X.

A Sketch of some vain and incoherent Opinions, patronized by modern Hereticks and Unbelievers.

WITH regard to the *Deity*, though many of them have not Effrontery enough to disown his Existence, yet, like their Master *Epicurus*, they in fact deny him.

It is very observable, that in these refined Theories, but little Stress is laid upon the Worship and Adoration of the *Supreme Being*, as though this, which ought to be the first Spring and leading Principle of Religion, was only a low and subordinate Part of it, or rather, no important Article at all in the new-modelled Systems of mere Morality.

One of them, who pretends to be a great Teacher of *Ethicks*, is hardy enough to tell us, that *Prayer* is rather *displeasing than a grateful Offering to God*^h. Another glories, that some of the *Heathens* used no Prayers at all; and insinuates in their Names, that it is

^h Chubb's posthumous Works, Vol. I. p. 283, 284.

no rational Part of Duty¹. How much more just and becoming would it have been to have drawn from such Premises, this obvious and natural Conclusion, *viz.* that the Gospel teaches better Things.

The moral Perfections of the Deity are sometimes spoke of with a solemn Air of Reverence; but how often with Indifference, or with much Doubt or Uncertainty, or sometimes with an *ironical* sneer, amounting to little less than Contempt and Ridicule. One of them is profane enough to assert, that *we have no Assurance of the Existence of the supreme Being, while we argue from the Course of Nature*^k: and what is the grand Reason he assigns for this bold Assertion? *Because the Subject lies entirely beyond the Reach of human Experience.* And in another Place^l, he is absurd enough to say, that *God discovers himself by some faint Traces or Outlines, beyond which we have no Authority to ascribe to him any Attribute or Perfection.* What we imagine to be a superior Perfection, may really be a Defect; or were it ever so much a Perfection, the ascribing of it to the Supreme Being, where it appears

¹ Blount's Notes on Philostratus, p. 38.

^k Hume's Philosophical Essays, p. 214.

^l Philosophical Essays, p. 222.

not to have been really exerted to the full in his Works, savours more of Flattery and Panegyrick, than of just Reasoning and sound Philosophy.

Another Writer, of the same Class, will not allow the Propriety of ascribing moral *Attributes* to the *Deity*; and he treats those as profane, who *talk of imitating God in his moral Perfections*. This, in his elegant Stile, he calls *Theological Familiarity* ^m.

It is no Wonder that Writers of this Stamp have the same crude and indigested Notions of the *Providence of God*.

Some take the *Reins of Government* entirely out of the Hands of the great Ruler of the Universe; and they deny all divine Superintendence over the Affairs of this World, as though it was beneath the Majesty of the Most High.

Others do not go to such extravagant Lengths. They will acknowledge a general, but not a *special Providence*, as presiding over collective Bodies of Men, but not condescending to the Care and Cognizance of private Individuals.

What can be greater Impiety than this? to abridge the Power of the Almighty, and

^m Lord Bolingbroke.

to dare to ascribe Bounds to an infinite Being, whose *tender Mercies* are over all *his Works*, and without whose heavenly Inspection not a *Sparrow falls to the Ground!*

These over-refined *Moralists* talk indeed of Virtue in very high and exalted Strains; of *moral Taste and Delicacy of Sentiment*; of *Benevolence*, and the whole Train of social Affections: but *Faith, Grace, Redemption* by Christ, and a heavenly minded Spirit of Piety and Devotion (which are the blessed Hopes and Comforts of a Christian) they expunge, as useless Ingredients in Religion, as no better than the *artificial Cobwebs of Religion*, fitter to *catch Insects* than to amuse or profit rational Creatures.

One noble Writer ^a paints *Virtue* in a very engaging and lovely Dress; but this is but one Side of the *Portrait*? look on the other, and you will see that he strips her of all the Hopes of *Reward*; and blames the Expectation of it, as mercenary, slavish, and disingenuous. Here his fine *Flowers* wither, as it were, away, for Lack of Nourishment, and may be said to fade and droop in the *Shade*, for want of the *Sunshine* of Heaven to enliven them.

^a Lord Shaftsbury.

Another

Another Writer pretends to great Improvements in the Theory of *Morals*, by lopping off some Branches, and substituting others in the Room of them. ° *Wit, Eloquence, Delicacy of Taste*, and almost every agreeable Accomplishment of the Mind, he comprehends within the *Circle*, as constituent and essential Parts of *moral Excellence*; but *Humility, Mortification, and Self-denial*, sink so far below his sublime Sentiments, that he represents them as no better than *monkish Virtues, which stupify the Understanding, and harden the Heart, obscure the Fancy, and sour the Temper.*

Amongst these Writers, what Uniformity of Sentiment, what moral Harmony can be expected? They all pretend to *Free-thinking*, but rather to think at random, without Order or Consistence.

Some undermine the very Foundation of moral *Rectitude*, by denying the eternal and immutable Difference between Good and Evil. What a Violation is this of the *Nature* of Things, as well as of the most sacred Principles of Religion!

Some have been weak enough to resolve all moral Obligation into the sole Will and

° Hume's Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals.

Power of the Magistrate ^P: but how feeble and tottering must that Structure be, which stands upon no surer Basis than the vague and capricious Institutions of civil Authority?

One of this Complexion, above all, is so very paradoxical as to decry *Virtue*, though the *Pillar* of all private as well as social Happiness; and to turn the great Advantages of it to the opposite Side, by asserting, that *private Vices are publick Benefits* ^Q.

Nor are less Objections started concerning a *future State*, though the grand *Hinge* of all Religion. With what a Philosophical Air have we been told by *Spinoza* and his Followers, that there is no Substance in Nature but *Matter*! and that the spontaneous Motions of the Body, and all the *Phænomena* of thinking, may be physically accounted for, as the Result only of a *material System*. What can be more absurd than to ascribe Self-motion to stubborn Inactivity? *Compounds* must be similar to the *Parts* of which they are compounded: but Thought is diametrically opposite to the sluggish Nature of Matter; and it is impossible that outward Organization, or a mere *Modification* of Parts, can change

^P Hobbes.

^Q Mandeville.

the Effence of Things ; or bestow that *Consciousness*, which must center in one simple uncompounded Substance, upon any System or Species of Matter, which is infinitely *divisible*.

How apt are these Objectors to stumble upon metaphysical as well as upon sacred Ground ! They are no better Friends to true Philosophy than to true Religion. Whether we consider the moral Perfections of God, or the unequal Distribution of the Things of this World ; the Hopes of the Righteous, or the Fears of the Wicked ; the Forebodings of Conscience, the Desire of Knowledge, and the earnest *Longings* after Immortality ; what strong Pledges are these of a future State !--- The Voice of all Antiquity confirms them ; all Nature proclaims the Certainty of a Life to come.

* One of these Writers indeed must be excepted : he has Ingenuity enough to acknowledge, that this *Life* is only a State of *Discipline*, and that another awaits us beyond the *Grave* ; and he is so far from excluding a future State, that he makes a Sense of this one of the *five essential Articles of natural Religion*. But even here he will not admit *divine Reve-*

* Lord Herbert.

lation as of any Use in this important Discovery. Human Reason, in his Eye, must have all the Glory, though the Gospel is truly said to have brought Life and Immortality to Light.

Another of this Class, rather than do Honour to the Religion of Jesus, expressly says, that the ' antient Theists, Polytheists, Philosophers and Legislators, invented this Doctrine: and in another Place, that it was owing to Ægypt, the Mother of sound Policy, as well as Superstition. But though he acknowledges the great Use of this Principle, yet how inconsistent is he with himself! What Pains does he take to weaken the natural Proofs of it, and to invalidate the strongest Arguments which Reason suggests! But particularly, the Scripture Doctrine of Rewards and Punishments in another World, is the constant Subject of his Invectives. It would be too tedious to refer to particular Passages; I shall only observe, that he not only condemns the general Doctrine, but finds great Fault with the particular Images and Descriptions of it, which the sacred Oracles, with the greatest Dignity and Solemnity of Truth, so nobly afford us. To use his own Phrase, he represents them as nearly resembling the My-

* Bolingbroke, Vol. V. p. 288. 352.

thologia de Inferis, which has been so often laught at ^t.

Thus between the Disputers of this World, how is Religion crucified, like it's blessed Author, *between Thieves* !

Some are only a kind of Half-Retainers to the Cause of Infidelity. Though they do not deny the divine Authority of the Gospel, yet by their false Interpretations and novel Inventions, they often act a more inconsistent Part than *Unbelievers* themselves. Like *Judas*, they betray their *Master with a Kiss*; and under a specious Colour of Friendship, they perhaps do more Mischief to Religion by their false Arts and Insinuations, than the bold and undisguised Attempts of it's most open Enemies.

In the Mouths of all, both Hereticks and Infidels, many soft Apologies are often pretended to be given; but their very Excuses betray their Cause, and heighten their Guilt. But such as they are, though vain and superficial, it may not be improper to allow them a short Examination.

^t Bolingbroke, Vol. V. p. 542.

S E C T. XI.

A brief Examination of those Excuses, which are generally urged by false Christians and avowed Unbelievers.

THE first Apology generally offered, is the universal *Right of private Judgment*, to which all are said to have an unalienable *Title*, as being the common Privilege of Nature.

But how often is Liberty perverted, and made Use of only as a *Cloak to Maliciousness*? especially by Hereticks and Unbelievers; who, as the Prophet observes, *trust in Vanity, and speak Lies; who conceive Mischief, and bring forth Iniquity.* Is. liv. 4.

But that we may the better judge in what Latitude this our pretended *Birthright* ought to be enjoyed, let us briefly state the Arguments on both Sides.

Some, who call themselves the true Friends of universal *Liberty*, assert, that there ought to be no Restrictions at all; that an unlimited Freedom in all speculative Enquiries is the great *Prerogative* of Reason, allowed of

by the common Principles of Humanity, and agreeable to the Genius and Spirit of the Gospel. These maintain, that Religion is only a *personal* Concern; that outward Force can never bind the inward Consciences of Men; that it may make them *Hypocrites*, but not true Believers; and that as the secret Persuasions of the Mind are not within the Cognizance of human Jurisdiction, all have an undoubted Right to enjoy their own Principles, and to be free from the Shackles of arbitrary Authority.

On the other Hand, there are many who likewise call themselves the Friends of *Liberty*, who do not deny the Force of these Arguments in general, but think they will not bear the unlimited and indefinite Conclusions drawn from them, especially in Favour of those who tear up Religion by the very *Root*, and are ever busy in propagating the pernicious Seeds of Heresy and Infidelity. They conclude, that if unrestrained Impunity was granted to all without Distinction, that a wide Door would be opened to Licentiousness; that the Consequence would be highly injurious to the civil as well as the sacred Rights of Mankind; that evil Opinions might often have as fatal an Influence upon the Peace, Order and Happiness of Society, as any Overt-acts whatsoever;

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soever ; and that without the coercive Measures of Government, the State would have no Security, no outward *Fence* of Truth, nor *Bond of Union*. They infer therefore, that the civil Magistrate ought not to look on with an Eye of Indifference, and, like *Gallio*, to care for none of these Things ; but that it is his especial Duty, as the *Guardian* of publick Happiness, to act with Diligence and Uprightness, and to establish all necessary Provisions, that the *Commonwealth* may receive no Harm.

This has been the Subject of much Debate ; and indeed it is difficult to draw the nice Line, which determines the respective Boundaries of *Liberty* and Authority in all Cases whatsoever. I shall only observe, that Hereticks and Unbelievers have certainly no Pretensions to *publick Favour* and *Indulgence*, because their Principles are often injurious to Society as well as Religion. Our social and sacred Rights are so twisted and incorporated with each other, that neither of them can be properly enjoyed, without a due and regular Preservation of both. Inasmuch therefore as the Community suffers, it has an undoubted Right to defend itself : for if such a Power was not lodged in the Hands of Government, to guard itself against some evil and dangerous Principles,

Principles, how could the Frame and Constitution of it be supported in a Manner consistent with Order, Tranquillity, and publick Happiness?

Perhaps *Neglect* or Contempt may generally be the most adviseable Expedient; but when *Heresy* and Infidelity open the Flood-gates, and pour in a Deluge of Opinions, destructive of the civil as well as the religious Interests of Mankind, how necessary is it to raise a Bank against such a Tide of Mischief, and to prevent, if possible, the *Overflowings of Ungodliness*. If some extreme Cases seem to call for coercive Measures, will it not become the Wisdom of the Legislator to interfere? but, it is to be hoped, with Tenderneſs as well as Justice. --- Let not the Laws be strained to the utmost *Rigour*; let them be tempered with *Mercy*, mild and gentle as the Circumstances of Things can possibly admit. Let them be calculated rather for publick Shame, than private Correction; rather for the Benefit of others, than as personal Inflictions upon the unhappy Offenders; and with a salutary View, rather to prevent future Evils, than as immediate Punishments for past Transgressions.

But let these Despisers of Religion and Government know, that the Lenity of any
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civil Administration is no Testimony of their Innocence ; and that if they do escape the Hands of Justice in this World, they will be accountable to a higher Tribunal, before the great Judge and *Searcher of Hearts*.

2dly. Another *Plea* very often urged in Favour of heretical Opinions, is, that the Understanding is passive in it's Perceptions, and that the ultimate Result of them cannot but be the determinate Rule of our Judgments.

But what an ill-grounded Excuse is this ? especially when it comes out of the Mouths of Unbelievers. It may be allowable in some Instances, where, notwithstanding our best Endeavours, the *Error* is unavoidable ; but religious Mistakes are more apt to arise from a wilful Abuse of Reason, than from a well-intended Application of it. Indeed our *simple Ideas*, and some Combinations of them, may be said to be involuntary : they strike upon the Imagination almost irresistibly, and as it were by *Intuition* ; and with such a Glare of Evidence, that we can no more alter the Impression, than a *natural Man* can change the Cast of his Features, when *he beholds his Face in a Glass*.

But in most complex Enquiries, there is a long Chain of intermediate Ideas ; and we cannot

cannot but be conscious of a Power of controlling the inward Motions and Operations of the Mind. Let any Man examine the Reflections of his own Heart; do not his own *Feelings* tell him, that he has a Freedom within himself of comparing, compounding, and separating his Ideas? And if he does not perceive the Agreement or Disagreement of them, the Fault will be, more than is generally imagined, owing to himself rather than to his intellectual Faculties *.

In the whole Process of Argumentation, the *Will* has a great Influence over the Mind. It may guide and direct the Judgment, chalk out this or that Path for it's Pursuit, and suggest right or wrong Means of Investigation. It was to this *Volition* or *Choice*, that *Joshua* appealed, when he said to the *Israelites*, *If it seem evil to you to serve the Lord, choose ye this Day whom ye will serve; whether the Gods which your Fathers served, that were on the other Side of the Flood, or the Gods of the Amorites, in whose Land ye dwell; but as for me and my House, we will serve the Lord.* Josh. xxiv. 15.

* We can hinder, as Locke observes, both Knowledge and Assent, by stopping our Enquiry, and not employing our Faculties in the Search of any Truth. And a little lower he has these Words; We can prevent or suspend our Assent. B. 4. c. 20.

If it be not in our own Power to be cateless and superficial, or diligent and attentive in our Researches after Truth, how vain would all Exhortations or Commands be to *search the Scriptures*, to *try the Spirits*, to *prove all Things*, and to *hold fast that which is good*? Who can pretend to say, that a Perusal of the *Bible*, the Selection of Books, the Choice of ministerial Advice, and all the external Modes of Instruction, do not depend upon the free Direction and Arbitration of our own Hearts? If we neglect the proper Means of Edification, how can we expect, with any Success, the Attainment of Knowledge? And if Ignorance be the Result of that Neglect, where can the Blame of it lye, but at our own Door? It proceeds not from the Passiveness of the Understanding, but the Perverseness of the Will: and surely *Herefiarchs* and *Unbelievers* have, above all others, the least Shadow of Pretence that they are bound, by the *Iron Rod* of Necessity, to think and reason according to their Perceptions, of Things. The whole Train of their Opinions and Conduct betray them; their visionary Schemes, and unwearied Attempts to *cause others to err from the Word of Knowledge*, plainly manifest a Self-determination to *put*

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Good for Evil, and Evil for Good; Bitter for Sweet, and Sweet for Bitter.

Thus how weak and inconsistent are the Pleas of Unbelievers? Sometimes they shelter themselves under a *Cloak of Liberty*, and sometimes under that of hard Necessity; whereas the true Cause will generally be found to be, in a wilful Contempt of all rational Evidence.

3dly. Another specious Gloss often put upon erroneous Opinions, is a pretended *Sincerity* of Heart; and both Hereticks and Unbelievers undoubtedly think themselves extremely happy in the Choice of this *Subterfuge*, as being out of the Reach of human Detection, and cognizable to no Authority upon Earth, but that of their own Consciences.

Indeed there is no Complexion of the Soul which can be a fairer Ornament to *Truth*, or a more favourable Cover to a Multitude of *Errors*, than a sincere and unfeigned Desire of knowing the *only true God*, and what is his divine and *heavenly Will*. This undissembled Purity of Heart, though we run into some incidental Mistakes, cannot but engage our Pardon in the Court of Heaven, before a merciful and righteous Tribunal. But when a sacred *Veil* is assumed, with no other View
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but to give a specious Colouring to *Falshood*; what can possibly be a greater Aggravation of it? What can add more to it's Guilt, than those Cankers of all Truth, *Disimulation* and *Hyprocrisy*? *A sincere Man*, says a late learned Prelate^w, is one who takes all possible Care to inform his Conscience aright, and then to act according to it; and not one who, without any such Care, acts according to his own Persuasion, which is nothing but *Prejudice*, when the Care has not gone before it. If these are the distinguishing Marks of *Sincerity*, it is to be feared that they will be seldom found in vitiated and corrupted Minds, which are so far from being open to *Conviction*, or attentive to the Voice of Truth, that they hate to be reformed.

Many honest and well-meaning Christians may differ from each other concerning the outward Forms, the Rites and Ceremonies of Religion; but if they are serious in their Profession, and regular Observers of what they think their Duty, here the solemn *Plea of Conscience* may be fairly admitted; and it would be the highest Breach of Charity to call their *Sincerity* in Question, and much more to pass a severe Sentence of Condemnation upon them.

^w Bishop Hoadley.

But what shall be said in Favour of them, who *fit in the Seat of the scornful, and make a Mock at Sin?* who ridicule the most essential Articles of Religion, though confirmed to us by the clearest and strongest Signatures of divine Authority, by such an excellent System of moral Duty, as puts all Philosophy to the Blush; by such Miracles as *no Man could do, except God was with him*; and by a long continued Series of *Prophecy*, pointing out the most important Events in all the History of Mankind, from the Beginning of the World to it's last and final Period. *Let the Tree be judged by it's Fruits*, and we may venture to say, that *Sincerity* can hardly be a *Plant* which grows in such a *corrupted Soil*.

4thly. The Unbeliever still goes on in the vain Confidence of boasting; and the Heretic very often apologizes for himself in the same Strain, though they would both be thought to stand in need of no Apology. They would insinuate, that they have no other prevailing Motives in their Hearts, than a sacred Reverence for *Truth*, and a most disinterested Zeal for the Good and Welfare of their Fellow-creatures.

It is well known, that almost all the Writings of this kind are full of such declamatory Harangues.

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One of them glories that *he*² has thrown new Light upon the most curious and sublime Subjects; and in his *Essay upon Miracles*,² he flatters himself that *he* has discovered an Argument, which, if just, will with the wise and learned be an everlasting check to all Kinds of superstitious Delusions, and consequently will be useful, as long as the World endures.

And another³ Writer of the same Class makes the most solemn Professions of his good Intentions, for which he calls God to witness, and declares, that in what *he* has offered to the World, he has appealed to the Understanding, and not to the Passions of Men, that with Sincerity and Truth *he* can say, *he* has a real Concern and Regard for the present Well-being of his Fellow-Creatures as well as to their future Happiness.

What an affected Shew of Benevolence is this! What Mock-Patriots are they, who pretend to burn with great Zeal for the publick Good, though at the same time it is their highest Ambition to destroy the most sacred and important Interests of Mankind, the only true Foundation of their present as well as future Felicity.

² Hume's Philosophical Works, p. 174.

³ Chubb's posthumous Works, Vol. II. p. 354, 355. *ibid.*
357.

In this licentious Age therefore, when Errors and Iniquity so much abound, when the very Name of Orthodoxy does with some become a common Cant of Reproach; how much does it concern all Christians, but especially those who are set apart for the *ministerial Function*, to guard against the subtle Artifices and Insinuations of false Teachers, and to take heed to themselves, that having honest and good Hearts, like good Seed sown upon good Ground, they may bear the Word, and keep it, and bring forth Fruit with Patience.

SECT.

S E C T. XII.

The Conclusion; addressed to the younger Students in the University; shewing the Utility of Human Learning, for the Advancement of religious Knowledge, and in Opposition to the ill-grounded Objections of Hereticks and Unbelievers.

GENTLEMEN,

YE cannot but be conscious of the many and singular Advantages ye enjoy, by being placed in a Train of Education the most honourable to yourselves, and the most useful to others. If ye look round to many other Nations, ye will see that Ignorance and Superstition are entailed upon them by a kind of Inheritance, the worst *Legacies*² which their *Ancestors* could leave them; and for which neither the Possessions of Riches nor Honour can make a due Compensation.

² His me consolator, victurus suavius, ac si
Quæstor avus, pater atque meus, patruusque fuissent.

HOR. SAT. VI. 130.

But

But it is your Happiness to be born in a Protestant Country, of Christian Parents, and in a Land of Liberty; where Truth shines in it's full Blaze of Evidence, and with all it's attractive Charms. Your intellectual Faculties, from the most early Dawnings of Reason, have not been left uncultivated and unimproved; but the best Principles of Religion and Virtue have been instilled into you, and no Care has been wanting to direct and animate your Pursuits, *to stir up the Gifts that are in you*, and to render those *Talents* which are committed to your Trust (if not neglected by yourselves) an Ornament to the present as well as to the succeeding Age.

Many local Advantages are here before you: *the Key of Knowledge is in your own Hands*. In the Language of Solomon, *here Wisdom has built her an House*; the Door opens almost spontaneously; and the further you enter in, the more you will find it adorned and furnished *with excellent Things*.

The first Rudiments of Learning will gradually lead you, as by the *Hand*, to higher Attainments. Your Acquaintance with the *Classicks*, and many elegant Writers of the present Age, will much refine and embellish your Minds, will enliven your Imaginations, strengthen your Judgments, and inspire you
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with a peculiar Niceness and Delicacy of Taste, which will greatly facilitate your Progress in more serious and important Studies ^a.

You will find, that *Logick*, natural and moral Philosophy, and indeed most Disquisitions in every Science, will lend you a kind subsidiary Aid; will teach you to arrange your Thoughts, to form your Reasonings with Order and Regularity, to explain them with Perspicuity, and enforce them with Dignity.

Some of the Enemies of our *Faith* (as far as their little Learning could carry them) have fetched their Objections against Chris-

^a *Clemens* of Alexandria, *Eusebius*, and most of the Fathers, not only maintained the Lawfulness of reading *Pagan Authors*, but demonstrated the Utility of them by their own Writings. *Socrates* has employed a whole Chapter in recommending human Literature, and particularly represents *St. Paul* as a Pattern worthy of Imitation. The Apostle, says he, does not only not forbid our being instructed in the Grecian Learning; but he himself seems not to have neglected it, as he knew many Sayings which were spoken by the *Grecians*. For whence took he Occasion of using this Saying—*The Cretians are Liars, evil Beasts, slow Bellies*—except it were from the Perusal of the Oracles of *Epimenides* the *Cretian*, and who was an Initiator. Or whence knew he this—for we are also his Offspring—unless he had been acquainted with the *Phænomena* of *Aratus*? Moreover this, *Evil Communications corrupt good Manners*, is a sufficient Evidence that he was not unacquainted with *Euripides' Tragedies*. And he further observes, that by an uninterrupted Usage, as it were, the *ecclesiastick Doctors* continually studied the Grecian Arts and Sciences. *Socrat. Ecclef. Hist. Lib. iii. c. 16.*

tianity from the darkeſt Corners of Antiquity. How neceſſary therefore muſt it often be to trace their Footſteps through all their Turnings and Windings, to invalidate their Authorities, to confront their Arguments, and to ſhew the transcendent Excellency of the Goſpel System above the utmoſt Efforts of Pagan Philoſophy ^b.

Truth never ſhews itſelf in a higher Form of Dignity and Splendor, than when it is contraſted by Falſhood. Even the wiſeſt *Apotheſms* and fineſt *Sayings* of the Heathens will not bear the ſuperior Light of the Goſpel. Place them in Oppoſition to each other, what a Darkneſs is caſt over the one, but what a Luſtre is given to the other ! *Gather moral Sayings*, as Mr. Locke obſerves, *from all the Sages of the World, and they will not be ſufficient to make an entire Body of the Law of Nature.* There may be ſome Congruity in Kind, but a great Diſparity of Excellence : but the Chriſtian Scheme is perfect in all it's Parts ; and not only ſhews the Harmony and Connexion between natural and revealed Religion, but represents all the faireſt Sentiments of Nature, all the heavenly Graces and Af-

^b The fourth Council of Carthage made a Canon againſt reading the Books of Pagans ; but they allowed the Liberty of peruſing thoſe of Hereticks *pro neceſſitate*.

fections of the Soul, all the most divine Precepts of moral Duty, in the strongest Light, in their full Extent, and in their highest Perfection.

But though human Learning, out of it's deepest Treasures, cannot produce a *Pearl of great Price*, equal to that of the Gospel; yet it must be allowed to be a valuable Acquisition. It cannot indeed augment the inexhaustible *Riches of the divine Wisdom*, but may be of Service to point out the Difference between pure *Gold* and adulterated *Coin*.

Neither is Learning, when it has a right Direction, and is made subservient to the Interest of the Gospel, of less Use, with regard to the external Evidences of the Gospel.

Miracles indeed are an Appeal to the Senses of Mankind, and may be said to be within the Reach of common Understandings; but what Pains have been taken by Hereticks and Unbelievers to weaken this Argument, though an irresistible Proof of our holy Religion! All the Monuments and Records of antient Writings have been searched, with a malignant View to depreciate the Truths of the Gospel. All the *Wonder-Workers* amongst the Gentiles, such as *Apollonius, Tyaneus, Apuleius*, and a long Train of others, which disgrace

the Pages of *Livy*, have been brought upon the Stage, and set in Competition with the Signs and Wonders of *Christ* and his *Apostles*. Even popish Miracles have been much insisted upon, and said to be grounded upon Testimony not inferior to that of the Scriptures.

To fix therefore the just Criterion between true and false Miracles, to define their Properties, to ascertain the Powers of Nature, to expose the wild Pretensions of Magick, to point out the fictitious Delusions of Impostors, and to shew the illustrious Attestations of Truth in their full and genuine Force, we may justly ask, Who is sufficient for these Things? Who can *attain to such Knowledge*, but the thinking, the inquisitive, and truly learned Part of Mankind?

Neither is Learning less necessary to elucidate and confirm the Truth of the Scripture Predictions. The Language of Prophecy is often conveyed in ambiguous and symbolical Terms, which the ignorant and unwary can no more understand, than if they were couched under *Egyptian Hieroglyphicks*. The Stile indeed is capable of a fair and logical Construction, but above the Reach of low and illiterate Minds; neither can such penetrate into the thick *Covert* in which Prophecies,
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for many wise Reasons, are often involved.-- When this Obscurity therefore is objected against by Persons of an heretical and sceptical Turn of Mind, who but the wise and learned can develope this mysterious Scene of Providence? Who else can point out the several *Links* of this long-extended Chain, and shew their Connection with each other, or the Relation they bear to the various Events and Revolutions which have come to pass in the several Ages of the Christian Church? Who else can answer the Cavils of Unbelievers, and *put to Silence the Ignorance of foolish Men?*

Your Acquaintance with profane *Literature* will shew you, that most of the Facts recorded in the Gospel are confirmed and authenticated by the Testimony both of Jewish and Pagan Writers, who, though the professed Adversaries of our holy Religion, have given an undesigned Sanction to the Truth of it. The *Confession of Enemies*, as *Eusebius*^c observes, *is always reckoned credible*. Even out of the *Mouths* of Infidels and Hereticks God has *ordained Strength*; and Learning may often extract very salutary Effects from

^c Euseb. Præp. Evan. Lib. iv. p. 142. et Demon. Evang. Lib. iii. p. 134.

them,

them, like the *Honey* of the *industrious Bee*, even from the *bitterest Herbs*. It were to be wished therefore, that none of the Writings, either of *Porphyry*, *Celsus*, *Hierocles*, or other avowed Opposers of the Gospel, had been destroyed, either through the false Zeal of private Christians, or by the publick *Edicts* of Christian *Emperors*.

It may be farther observed, that Christianity is so far from having lost Ground from the malevolent Opposition of modern Hereticks and Unbelievers, that *Age*, which usually weakens the Proof of other Subjects, has given Strength to the Gospel. Every Part of it has been canvassed with the nicest Precision; *Learning* has not wasted it's Powers in vain; but if it has not stopped the Mouths of Infidels, it has done more; it has baffled their Arguments, set at nought their Objections, and has shewn the divine Authority of *Christ* and his Apostles with such an irresistible Force of Evidence, as amounts even to Demonstration itself.

Thus *Wisdom* is justified of her Children; and here I intended to conclude; but I beg Leave to trespass upon your Patience a little longer, while I recommend to you the Study of *Ecclesiastical History*: and this I am induced to do

do upon many Accounts, *because* I am now addressing myself to them who are chiefly intended for the ministerial Function---because this Branch of Study is, next to the Scriptures, peculiarly adapted for the Advancement of *Theological Knowledge*---because some Objections have been raised against it --- and *because* the Nature of the former, as well as the present Dissertation, does in some Measure demand a particular Vindication of it.

The *Study of Church History* has been much vilified by some, as a fruitless Mode of Investigation, unentertaining and unedifying, as tending rather to bewilder the Mind in the dark and intricate Mazes of Antiquity, than to give it a true Insight into the sacred Treasures of religious Knowledge.

In Proof of this, the Authority of *Grotius* has been much insisted upon, who, though well informed in all the standing Records of the Church, is said to look back upon them with a real Disgust. He asserts in one of his *Epistles*, that he that reads *Church History*, reads nothing but the *Bickerings of the Clergy*. And another *Writer* gives his Testimony in the same Strain, and in much stronger Terms. *Ecclesiastical History*, says he, is chiefly spent in reciting the wild Opinions of Hereticks, the Contentions

tentions between Emperors and Popes, the idle and superstitious Canons, and ridiculous Decrees and Constitutions, of packed Councils, their Debates about frivolous Matters, and playing the Fool with Religion, the Consultations of Synods, about augmenting the Revenues of the Clergy, and establishing their Pride and Grandeur, the Impostures of Monks and Friars, the Schisms and Façons of the Church, the Tyranny, Cruelty, and Impiety of the Clergy ^d.

These are heavy Censures indeed; and it must be owned that there is too great a Foundation for them: but where ought the Weight of these Imputations to fall? Not upon Church History, or the learned Compilers of it; but upon the Frailties, the Follies and Vices of Mankind; upon those who have infested the Church of Christ with erroneous Opinions, and an evil Spirit of Faction and Sedition ^e.

The very *Essence* of *History* is a genuine and impartial Delineation of the Principles and Manners of Men. Its proper Basis is *Truth*,

^d Edward's New Discoveries, p. 40.

^e *Spondanus* having bestowed great Commendations on *Guicciardine*, makes this Remark, that, if sometimes he censures with Asperity Princes and other Persons, whose Conduct he relates, this is the Fault of the Guilty, not of the Historian. *Fleury's Discourse on Eccles. History.*

and

and when this is strictly and religiously adhered to in all it's Variety of Circumstances, you have then before you the accumulated Experience of all Nations, clearly distinguished, though as in a *Map*, compressed in it's Dimensions. Ye have here a Picture of human Nature realized by *Facts*; and what though the *Figures* often vary, and are distorted by the most odious and disagreeable Features; yet, when drawn according to *Life*, and represented in their proper Colours, they may, like grotesque Pieces of *Painting*, please as well as profit, and strike the Mind with Admiration.

What though some Parts are blackened by the foulest Corruptions of Heresy and Schism, by a long Train of Impostures, of *false Christs and false Prophets*, by a Parade of fictitious *Miracles* and *fabulous Legends*, by the dire Engines of *Persecution*, the Terrors of the *Inquisition*, and the most bloody *Crusades*; yet the *Historian* has not the Choice of his own *Subject*. He must describe Things as they really are, without Prejudice or Partiality, without the wild Excursions of Fancy, or the stiff and laboured Strains of *Exaggeration*.

Will any Man of Taste or Judgment reject the celebrated *Annals* of *Tacitus*¹, for no other Reason than because he tells us, that he had *nothing to relate but cruel Edicts, false Accusations, treacherous Friendships, and the Destruction of the Innocent?* The *Vices* which foreboded the Fall and Declension of the Roman Empire might, by a proper Application, teach as wise a Lesson of Instruction as those illustrious Virtues which first raised it to it's highest Pitch of Grandeur and *Magnificence*.

² *Polybius* indeed gives us an Instance of an ill-natured Historian, who made it his Business only to give the worst Representation of Things; who cast a *Shade* over the fairest Accomplishments, and only exposed to View the Follies and Absurdities of Mankind. What an evil Malignity of Heart was this, worthy of the highest Detestation! But when a Writer is faithful in his Narrations, judicious in his Reflections, and the whole is clothed with Candour and Veracity, though the Subject-Matter be unpleasing,

¹ *Sæva iussa, continuas accusationes, fallaces amicitias, perniciem innocentium.*

² Δηλοῖται καὶ ἵσχυται τοῖς συγγραφεῦσιν ὑπολαμῶσιν τὰς παρρησίας τῶν πράξεων ἐπισημαίνονται. *Polyb. Lib. ii. p. 146. Cas. Ed.*

yet the Form and Manner may not be disagreeable to a Reader's Mind.

The Memoirs of the Church, as well as the State, are often blended and interwoven with each other; and in a Composition of such a miscellaneous Nature, what can excite more delicate Emotions, or more refined Sentiments, than to see the Schemes of wicked and designing Men contrasted by the brightest Images of private and publick Virtue? *Good* may often be extracted out of Evil; as *Poison* itself, by a skilful *Physician*, may be rectified into a salutary *Medicine*: and we have no more Reason to find Fault with historical Collections, because they are compounded of different Materials, than with the common Productions of the *Earth*, because the Order and Beauty of *Nature* may be here and there defaced with some irregular Deformities.

The Scriptures themselves would lose much of their Utility and Excellence, if they did not exhibit to us the most striking and lively Descriptions both of the *Jews* and *Gentiles*. The ostentatious Pride of the *Scribes* and *Pharisees*, the Treachery of *Judas*, the Blasphemy of *Simon Magus*, the wild and extravagant Reveries of the *Gnosticks*, and other Enemies of the Faith, such as *Elymas* the Sor-

cerer, *Hymeneus* and *Philetus*, *Alexander* and *Diotrephes*. These are recorded as signal Monuments of Heresy, Profaneness and Impiety, that they *which are approved may be made manifest*, and eminently distinguished from those *who tell Lies in Hypocrisy*; and *these Things*, as the Apostle observes, *are written for our Admonition, upon whom the Ends of the World are come.* 1 Cor. x. 11.

Next to these sacred Oracles, if we have Recourse to the Writings of *Josephus*, how solemn and affecting are his Narrations! With what Seriousness does he declare his inviolable Regard to Truth! And whose Heart can be so hardened as to have no tender Feelings for the Sufferings of the Jews? The Calamities and Desolations which beset that unhappy People are described in so striking a Manner, and with such Accuracy and Precision, that they exactly tally and correspond with the *Gospel-History*, and shew the Accomplishment of our Saviour's Predictions, even in the minutest Circumstances.

Shall any one reject such grave and important Truths, founded upon real Facts, and upon such undeniable Authority, for no other Reason than because they are not, like *Romance*, calculated for Amusement only? If
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rightly considered, they give a Sanction to the Scriptures, and are the Vehicles of the most useful Instruction to all Posterity. The Testimony of this Writer cannot be called in Question: he was a *Native*, an *Actor*, and *Eye-Witness*, during the whole *Scene*; and though he was no Friend to the Religion of *Jesus*, he stands forth as an undesigned Evidence in Vindication of it.

How trifling is that Objection, that Church History is generally an incoherent Jumble of ill-sorted Materials. It may sometimes happen, that Things temporal may be intermixed with spiritual; such as relate to the *Church* as well as the *State*. But may not that Variety be often pleasing, as well as edifying? especially when the *Transition* from one Subject to another is easy, natural and pertinent. *Eusebius* was aware of this Objection; and he guards against it with a still better Apology. He interwove, he says, the *Calamities of War* with the contentious *Disagreement of Bishops*, the *Mischiefs of the State* with the *Troubles of the Church*; because when one is disturbed, the other cannot but by a kind of Sympathy be distempered and disordered. If the Conduct of the Emperors is passed over in Silence, it is impossible to form an adequate No-
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tion of the Synods which were usually convened and appointed by them ^h.

Without this Connection, the Course of his Narrations must have been often broken and imperfect; but being wove together as in *one Thread*, how much more regular and uniform must it be? The Facts must be better illustrated and better established.

I shall only observe, that ecclesiastical History affords the most compendious, and yet the most extensive Lesson of Instruction. It is the *School* both of speculative and practical Knowledge; and without artificial Flourishes, in a plain unaffected Dress, it appeals to the Heart as well as the Understanding. Each Object is presented as it were before our Eyes, alive and animated. The first Springs and Principles of Action, the Rise of heretical Opinions, the concomitant Circumstances of them, the Characters of *Herefiarchs*, the wide Spread of their Doctrines, and the false Arts made Use of in the Propagation of them; these are distinctly traced; and tho' this may be thought to be one of the darkest Regions of History, yet it must be of great Use to have the crooked Paths and Intricacies

^h The Preface to the fifth Book of Eusebius' Ecclesiastical History.

of Error laid open, and the judicious Reflections of the *Historian* will often afford a proper Clue to guide you through all Difficulties. You will here see the whole Train of Heresies in a just and regular Arrangement, both as to Time and Place, and may behold, as from the highest *Mountain of Nature*, all the *Kingdoms* of the Earth, at least as far as Religion is materially concerned.

It may not be improper to add, that the learned *Cave* recommends an Enquiry into *heretical Opinions* as highly worthy of a studious Investigation, and he has given us a List of many *Historical Writers* upon this Subject; and he observes, that a further Discussion of this Point, in a Manner equal to the Copiousness and Dignity of it, might be of Service to the learned World; for which Reason he ranks it (as he himself expresses it) *inter desiderata*ⁱ.

But human Learning, notwithstanding the great and singular Advantages of it, has had it's Enemies, as well as Religion. The superstitious Man hates it, because it appeals to Reason; the *Enthusiast*, because it lowers his high Pretences to divine Illuminations; and the Heretick and Infidel do the same, be-

ⁱ *Historia Literaria Prolegom.* p. 39.

cause it confutes their Arguments, detects their Fallacies, strips them of their false Disguises, and exposes to publick View the Folly and Vanity of all their Reasonings. Some, like the *Goths* and *Vandals*, have been Advocates for Barbarism itself. Some have pleaded for the *Burning of all Books*, except their *Bibles*; and many of our modern Enthusiasts have made a great Outcry against *Letter-learned Men*; and who will pretend to condemn their Policy? What shorter Method could they take to put their own *Ignorance* upon a Level with the fairest Productions of human Wisdom?

It must indeed be allowed, that human Literature may be capable of great Abuses, and may become an Engine of much Mischief, when engaged in a bad Cause; when, instead of defending the Truth, and supporting the Evidences of our holy Religion, it is employed as a *carnal Weapon* in the Hands of Infidels and Hereticks.

But let it be observed, that the possible Abuse, as well as the true Use of human Reason, pleads for the Utility and Excellence of academical Institutions, which are the Nurseries of both Religion and Learning; where profane Literature is taken in, as an
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useful Ally, for the *Furtherance of the Gospel*, is taught to act in a due Subordination to it ; and we hope and trust, as it has hitherto done, will greatly add (notwithstanding the insidious Attacks of *false Brethren*) to it's Honour and Triumph over all Imposture.

It cannot be said that any generous Incentives are here wanting ; either *Ability*, *Leisure*, *Example*, *Custom*, *Discipline*, or *Instruction* ; and indeed the great Encouragements held forth to many in this Place, by the Hands of *Founders*, and *Benefactors*, ought certainly to animate their Pursuits, to excite the Members of these learned Societies to support the Dignity of them, to keep themselves free from the Taint of Heresy and Infidelity, and to look up with Gratitude towards them, who are here appointed to be the Means and Instruments of their happy Proficiency in all their studious Investigations. The Emperor *Antonine*, though a *Heathen*, is in this respect worthy of *Imitation*. He begins his *Meditations* (as though this was the chief Burden of his Heart) with declaring a Sense of his Obligations to his *Grandfather*, his *Father*, his *Mother*, his *Preceptor*, to *Diognetus*, *Apollonius*, *Sextus*, *Alexander*, *Fronto*, and others ; and con-

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cludes with this grave and pious Reflection ;
*To the Gods, says he, I stand indebted, that I
had good Ancestors, good Parents, good Tutors
and Friends, and all other good Things^k.*

^k Anton. Lib. 1.

SECT.

S E C T. XIII.

The same continued ; with some practical Directions for the avoiding of heretical Opinions.

THE Author is not insensible, that to give Advice is a nice and difficult Task, by no Means agreeable to the nice Delicacy of some Appetites ; but, trusting that he is now addressing himself to liberal and ingenuous Minds¹, he begs Leave to subjoin some brief Directions, which, he hopes, will be considered as a seasonable *Antidote* against the Poison of Infidelity and Heresy.

First then, let your Pursuits after Knowledge be carried on with constant Diligence and Affiduity. The *Soil* of Nature requires

¹ With what a Sense of Gratitude did *Horace* record the paternal Care of his Father—

———— Sapiens vitatu, quidque petitu
Sit melius, causas reddet tibi : mi satis est, si
Traditum ab antiquis morem servare, tuamque
Dum custodis eges, vitam famamque tueri
Incolumem possim, simul ac duraverat ætas
Membra animumque tuum, nabis sine cortice.

Sat. Lib. i. p. 115.

Cultivation. Our rational Faculties, if unexercised and unemployed, will either be barren and unfruitful, or will be choaked with a wild Exuberance of Errors.

True Knowledge is more precious *than fine Gold*; but it does not lie upon the Surface; the *Mine* is deep, and we must *dig for it as for hid Treasures*. To gain a Proficiency in all *Arts and Sciences*, and especially in religious Enquiries, the utmost Care and Diligence are wanting. *Giving all Diligence*, says the Apostle, *add to your Faith Virtue, and to Virtue Knowledge, and to Knowledge Temperance, and to Temperance Patience, and to Patience Godliness, and to Godliness brotherly Kindness, and to brotherly Kindness Charity.* 2 Pet. i. 5, 6, 7.

You see that Diligence is made the chief Foundation, upon which this noble and exalted *Superstructure* is to be raised and supported.

The *sllothful Servant*, who will not be at the Pains to seek Truth, nor to know *his Master's Will*, can neither act up to the Dignity of a rational Creature, nor to the important Duties of a Christian; but how justly does such a supine Negligence deserve the Rebuke of *Solomon*? *Go to the Ant, thou Sluggard;*

gard; consider her Ways, and be wise. But how much greater Honour is due to them, whose Feet are shod with the Preparation of the Gospel of Peace? and, being armed with the Sword of the Spirit, are ready to stand forth in the Cause of Christianity, and to defend it with Learning and Industry against the Cavils of false Christians and Unbelievers? *Blessed is the Man, says Solomon in the Name of Wisdom, that beareth me, watching daily at my Gates, waiting at the Post of my Doors.*

To the Praise of the first Christian *Apolo-*
gists, let it ever be remembered, that they were wanting in no Endeavours for the *Furtherance of the Gospel*; but in the strenuous Vindication of it, they dared to appeal to *Emperors*, to the *Senate*, and to the hardened Hearts of their most inhuman Persecutors. Like the true Champions of the Faith, they *fought a good Fight*; their *Loins were girded about*, and their *Lights were always burning*.

2dly. Let your Pursuits after Knowledge be carried on with a sober, dispassionate, and disinterested Love of Truth. *The Scorners seeketh Wisdom, but findeth it not.* He is so perplexed in the Mazes of his own devising; so entangled in a *Labyrinth* of Errors, that he knows not how to find his Way through it.

it. His Understanding is darkened, his Will perverted; and when the *Light* which is in him, becomes *Darkness*, how great must that *Darkness* be!

But a sober and composed Frame of Spirit will weigh Things in an equal Balance; will compare *spiritual Things with spiritual*; and make a just Distinction between the holy Commandments of God, and the novel Inventions of Men. Such an one will be so far from verifying St. Paul's Description of *the last Times*, by giving heed to *seducing Spirits and the Doctrines of Devils*, 1 Tim. iv. 1. that he will inviolably maintain the Purity of his Principles, and keep himself unspotted from the World. No unruly Passions, no inordinate Appetites, will ruffle or discompose him: he will always set a strong Guard upon his Heart; *his House will be clean swept and garnished*, no evil Spirits will be permitted to enter in; and *the last State of this Man will be so far from being worse than the first*, that he will improve more and more in the Knowledge of God; and as his Eye is single, his whole Body also will be full of Light. Not the Desire of Gain, nor any secular Views, but the Love of Truth and Holiness will be the invariable Rule of his Thoughts and Actions.

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In the first Ages of Christianity, the Apostle tells us, that there were *Men of corrupt Minds and destitute of the Truth, supposing that Gain is Godliness*, 1 Tim. vi. 5. *who have taught Things which they ought not, for filthy Lucre's Sake*; or, as St. Peter describes them, *who through Covetousness, with feigned Words have made Merchandise of their Fellow-Creatures*, 2 Pet. ii. 3. But they that are truly spiritual will best discern the Things of the Spirit; they, who mind not earthly Things, and preach not themselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, will not be blinded by the God of this World; and the Light of the glorious Gospel of Christ, who is the Image of God, will shine unto them, 2 Cor. iv. 4.

3dly. *Whereunto ye have already attained, walk by the same Rule; mind the same Thing with Uniformity, Constancy, and Perseverance.* The first is necessary to fix in your Minds true Notions of Religion; the second, to *stablish, strengthen, settle* you in your Principles; and the last, to seal and crown your Faith, that ye may hold fast your Confidence to the End.

If once the Mind receives a wrong Bias, it will be too apt to start from its proper Center; to fly off by a kind of *Attraction* to
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Falshood, and be tossed to and fro with every Wind of Doctrine.

A weak and unstable Mind is like a Cloud without Water, ever shifting it's Opinions, and wavering like a Wave of the Sea.

In the whole Christian Scheme there is a just Harmony of *Sentiment*, such a regular Order and Symmetry in all it's Precepts, that the one gives Strength and Beauty to the other: *All the Building*, as it is elegantly expressed by the Apostle, *fitly framed together, will grow into an holy Temple in the Lord, Jesus Christ himself being the chief Corner Stone*, Eph. ii. 20.

How therefore can *this Analogy of Faith* be preserved in it's Purity and Perfection, and in all it's Relations and Dependencies, unless ye hold fast the Form of sound Words, and continue stedfastly in the Things which ye have learned, knowing of whom ye have learned, 2 Tim. iii. 14.

In the first Ages of the Church, how many both of *Jews* and *Gentiles* were false Converts, and revolted from the Truth? such as *Aquila* the Translator of the Bible, the Followers of *Barchocbebab*, the *Traditores* in the Reign of *Dioclesian*, the Apostate *Julian*, and many others that might be mentioned. I shall only

ly observe, that every kind of Apostacy in them, *who had tasted of the heavenly Gift*, was always considered by the Church as the highest Offence, was exposed to the severest Penalty, and some looked upon it as an irre-missible Crime, even as the *Sin against the Holy Ghost*.

But the Rewards and Triumphs of Faith are due only to *them who overcome*; who, by a constant Perseverance in the Truth, *so run as to obtain the Prize of their high calling in God*. They who *hold the Beginning of their Confidence stedfast unto the End*, the same shall be saved. They shall be *in the Number of those that believe to the saving of the Soul*, Rev. ii. 10.

4thly. Since *heretical Opinions* so much abound, and are propagated with so much Art and Subtlety, as to *deceive, if possible, the very Elect*; how much does it concern all Christians to direct and guard the whole Process of their Enquiries with *Circumspection and Watchfulness*, with *Prudence and Charity*?

Because we have so many Adversaries within *our own Household*, as well as without; because so many *false Brethren*, like the *Arch-heretick* of all, go about seeking whom they may devour, under the fairest Colourings and the most specious Disguises, *deceiving and being*

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deceived;

deceived; how earnestly do the Scriptures exhort us to walk circumspectly, not as Fools, but as Wise? Beware of false Prophets, who come to you in Sheeps Cloathing; beware of the Pharisees, beware of the Scribes; take heed, Brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil Heart of Unbelief.

And *Watchfulness* seems to imply a still greater Intenfeness of Care and Caution, that ye may not be led into Temptation; a constant unremitting Vigilance, such as becometh the faithful Guardians of Truth and Virtue.

And that ye may steer your Course with Safety through a tempestuous Sea of Errors, that ye may avoid the Rocks and Shelves, and be conducted into a Harbour of Rest and Security, there is no Guide more necessary than that skilful Pilot, *Prudence*.

How passionately, and in what engaging Terms does *Solomon* recommend this excellent Virtue, as the constant Companion of Wisdom? *The simple inherit Folly, but the prudent are crowned with Knowledge, Prov. xiv. 8. Every prudent Man dealeth with Knowledge, but a Fool layeth open his Folly, Prov. xiii. 16. When Wisdom entereth into thine Heart, and Knowledge is pleasant to thy Soul, Discretion shall preserve thee, Understanding shall keep thee,*
Prov.

Prov. ii. 10, 11. *Keep sound Wisdom and Discretion, so shall they be Life unto thy Soul, and Grace to thy Neck; then shalt thou walk in thy Way safely, and thy Foot shall not stumble: when thou liest down, thou shalt not be afraid; yea, thou shalt lie down, and thy Sleep shall be sweet,* Prov. iii. 21, 22, 23, 24.

And wherever Wisdom and Prudence direct the Way, *Charity* never fails to follow in the same Train. *Charity suffereth long, and is kind*; and is so far from aggravating the Failings of our Fellow-creatures, that it covers a *Multitude of Sins*, those of others as well as our own.

Heretical Principles indeed are of so dangerous a Nature, that a sacred Regard to Truth, and to the Interest of Religion, will not permit them to be overlooked with a *passive Indifference*, much less to be protected under a *Veil of Indulgence*. They justly stir up some Sparks of Indignation; but let not these be kindled into a violent Flame of *Intolerance*. Common Humanity looks aghast at the Terrors of Persecution; and it cannot but feel some tender Emotions of Pity, even for the Unbeliever, though it may be truly said that he has none for himself.

5thly and lastly. Let your Love of Truth, and your Pursuits after it, be recommended

and enforced by Virtue, Humility, and Prayer to God for his divine Grace and Assistance. The wicked and profane Libertines of this World are not of a teachable Disposition; and *though ever learning, they cannot come to the Knowledge of the Truth, because they have Pleasure in Unrighteousness, and will not believe, lest their Deeds should be reprov'd.*

But Truth and Virtue are congenial to each other; so alike in Nature and Complexion, that the one naturally promotes the Interest of the other. A good Man, like the *Bereans*, will be open to Conviction, *will search the Scriptures, will try the Spirits, whether they be of God*, and with an impartial Scrutiny, will form his Judgment according to the best Directions of his Reason: And these rational Conclusions will meet with the easier Success, and command the more willing Assent, because they harmonize with the Sentiments, the Inclinations and Actions of a good Man. Here are no inward nor outward Obstructions; no *high Imaginations*, which exalt themselves against the Knowledge of God; but his Thoughts are governed by Reason, and *brought into Captivity to the Obedience of Christ*. Humility teaches us not to think *more highly of ourselves than we ought to think;*

think; and by instructing us in this excellent Lesson, to *know ourselves*, it is so far from betraying a Littleness or Meanness of Spirit, that it argues a true Greatness of Mind, as far as the Dignity or the Frailties of human Nature will reasonably admit.

This *Humbleness of Mind* will not only exalt us by virtue of it's own Influence, but more so by the Love and Favour of God, who is the *Father of Light*, from whom cometh every good and perfect Gift, and who is emphatically said to *resist the Proud, but to give Grace to the Lowly*.

What therefore can be more becoming the State and Condition of Man, than to ascribe our *Sufficiency* not to *ourselves*, but to the only wise God, who *giveth Wisdom*, and out of whose Mouth cometh Knowledge and Understanding? If any Man, says St. James, *lack Wisdom, let him ask of God, who giveth to all Men liberally, and upbraideth not*, James i. 5.

Let us pray to him, the *Father of Mercies*, and the *Giver of all good Things*, that by his divine Assistance co-operating with our own Endeavours, we may grow in Grace, and go on from Strength to Strength unto Perfection. And let us beg of him, that the Streams which flow from this pure Fountain of true Religion

gion and useful Learning, may be so watered with the Dew of his heavenly Benediction, that they may enrich the various Soils through which they direct their Course, and may render them more and more fruitful, to the Honour of God's Name, and to the Praise of the whole Earth.

The Prayer of *Simplicius*, though an Advocate for *Gentilism*, is so apposite to this Purpose, that it may not be improper to conclude the whole with the Application of it^m.

Grant, I beseech thee, O Lord, the Father and Guide of our Reason, that we may be mindful of the Dignity which thou hast conferred upon us; and afford us thy Assistance, that we may act as free Beings, that we may be purified from unreasonable Passions, and may subdue and govern them; and that by the Light of Truth, our Judgments may be so directed, that we may

23 OCT 62

^m After the Propagation of the Christian Religion, says Dr. *Jortin*, we find Forms of Adoration in some *Pagan Writers*, which are more rational and spiritual than the old Hymns and Prayers of their Ancestors. And how reasonable is it to suppose that these Improvements arose from the Gospel? As a Specimen of this, he particularly refers to this Prayer of *Simplicius*.

Fabricius's Character of *Simplicius* may not improperly be added—*Commentario ejus in Enchiridion Epicteti, fateor me ita esse affectum, ut in totâ antiquitate putem extare paucissima scripta (de Ethnicis loquor) quæ vel ad mores formandos saniora exempla contineant, vel providentiam divinam rectius afferant, propugnentque.* Fab. Bibl. Græc. p. 621.

adhere

*adhere to those Things which are really good :
Finally, I entreat thee, the Saviour, entirely to
remove the Mist from the Eyes of our Mind, that
according to the Expression of Homer, we may
know both God and Man, and what to each is
due.*

F I N I S.

124

Historical Overview

reference to the things which were said
to me, I cannot but be struck, and to
behold the light from the eyes of an angel, that
was sent to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and was
sent to the Gentiles also, and what is said in

23 OC 62